FREE X-MEN COMIC

'House of M' aftershocks start here!

WIZARD

THE BIGGEST EVENT OF 2005

TOP, FROM LEFT: Sinestro, Black Adam, Lex Luthor, Deathstroke & Cheetah
BOTTOM, CLOCKWISE: Wonder Woman, Superman & Batman

INFINITE CRISIS SPECIAL REPORT

The inside info on the most controversial shake-up in DC history

PLUS:

The countdown to SPIDER-MAN 3 starts here

MICHAEL TURNER

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THE COMICS MAGAZINE • 169

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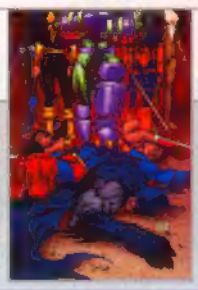
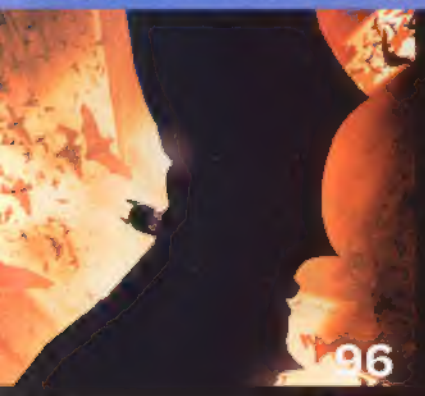
the covers



Months and months of build-up have finally brought the DC Universe to the brink of *Crisis*, and while all hell breaks loose for the superheroes, we celebrate with our *Infinite Crisis* cover by Michael Turner [at right]. The celebration doesn't end there; learn how DC got to this point with our behind-the-scenes look on p. 78. We're also going wild with "Spider-Man 3" fanticipation, as you can tell by our Spidey movie cover [far right]! We've rounded up all the news and info we could find, and we give it to you right on p. 70.



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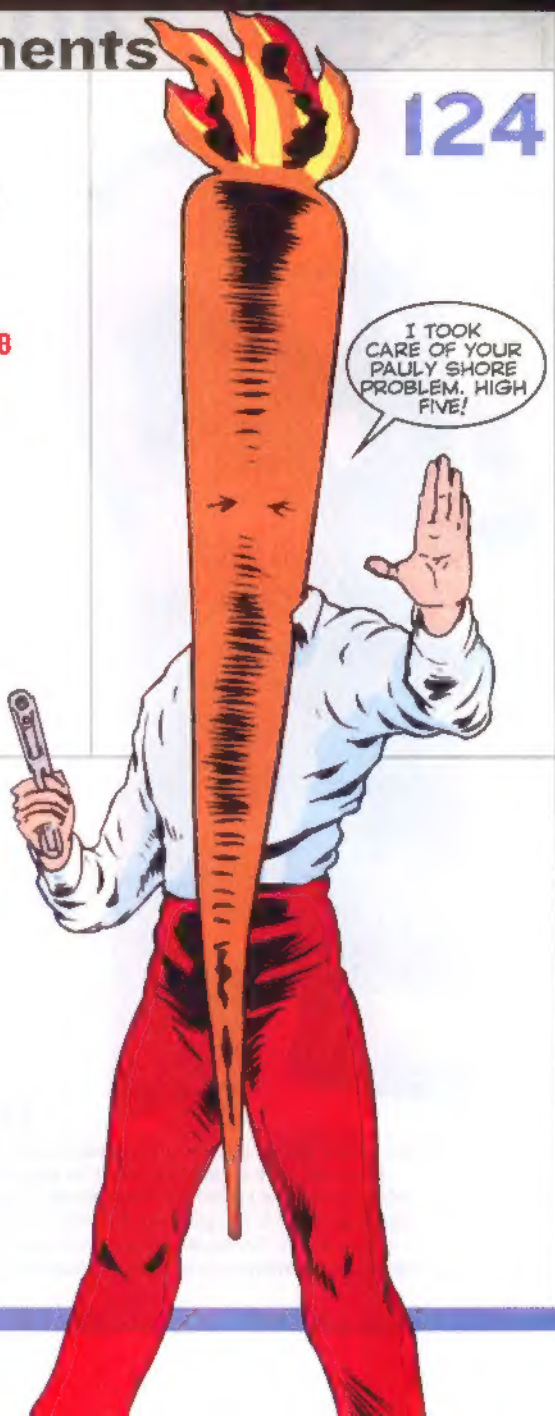

HALLOWEEN HOLLA!

Tricks and treats!

Nothing says October like brisk air, autumn colors...and rampant trick-playing and treat-enjoying! It's the only time of year—except maybe April Fool's—when humanity's true nature is exposed and we're all free to be evil, greedy, selfish little monsters, gorging ourselves on candy, running around in masks and being mean to people. And this issue's jam-packed full of that!

For starters, we've got treats for ya: tons of coverage on everything *Crisis*-related, starting with an exhaustive behind-the-scenes look back at how DC created the October-debuting *Infinite Crisis* on p. 78! It even features a nifty primer and scorecard to tally up all the players!

And because your sweet tooth demands it, we treat you to a bevy of the latest and most up-to-the-minute "Spider-Man 3" movie news on p. 70! There's also a plum of a treat in the *X-Men: Deadly Genesis* preview on p. 54, a story that, aptly enough, even involves *ghosts*!

But of course, Halloween isn't just about candy—we've also got some tricks in store! Naturally, we're egging your house with the *Wizard* Halloween Costume Contest on p. 40, a solemn annual tradition for geeks and boulevardiers to dress in their finest pretend clothes and gad about town in the guise of their favorite superheroes. You won't see anyone dressed as Magnum P.I. in here! We stop that kind of common riff-raff at the door.

Speaking of Halloween, I've got to put the finishing touches on my costume: a six-story-high Anti-Monitor suit from *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. I saved money by having *Wizard* interns do most of the building!

So until next month...BOO!

Gareb S. Shamus

BYTHENUMBERS...

7 Batman DVDs all being released on the same day (see p. 96)

35 Ninjas pictured in the Know Your Ninjas spread on p. 32

542 Total ways they could think of to kill you without you even noticing

8 D-list *Runaways* guest stars writer Brian K. Vaughan talks about in our Book of the Month on p. 122, including Ricochet, Swarm and the object of his lust, Power Pack's Julie Power

18 Julie Power's age during her *Runaways* appearance...barely

22 Trade paperbacks and graphic novels graded in our new Bookshelf format (see p. 118)

1 *Werewolf by Night* trade that shocked us with how good the stories were (seriously!)

10 1/4-pound hot dogs eaten by Research Assistant Karl Cramer to take second place in the Windmill National Hot Dog Eating Contest. Keep reaching for the stars, Karl!

16 *Wizard* staffers planning the most awesome Halloween costumes ever (check out our 14th annual Halloween Costume Contest on p. 40!)

16 Staffers going as Harry Potter

KARL "CHILI CON" CRAMER

masthead

MONSTER SQUAD

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WIZARD: THE COMICS MAGAZINE, volume one, issue One-Hundred Sixty-Nine (#169). November 2005.
Please direct all editorial-related inquiries to Wizard Editorial Dept., 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920-2064 (or Fax: 845-268-0022). Please address all subscription/renewal/comic and toy offer inquiries to: Customer Service, c/o Wizard Entertainment 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920. One-year subscription rate is $29.95 (Canada: $48; all other countries $70). All payments in U.S. funds only.
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WIZARD: THE COMICS MAGAZINE (ISSN 1065-6480) is published monthly by Gareb Shamus Enterprises Inc., D.B.A. Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY 10920-2064. Periodical postage paid at Congers, NY and additional mailing offices. RIDE ALONG ENCLOSED. Postmaster: Send address changes to WIZARD ENTERTAINMENT, PO Box 702, Sioux Oak, NY 10588-9901.

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GAMES PHOTO: STOCK PAGE

The death of thought balloons... Jennifer Connelly horrifies... and X-23's real origin?

What's that hiding in your bushes with a roll of toilet paper, Grade A farm fresh eggs and a paintball gun, inching closer to your brand-new Hyundai? Could it be?!? Is that...yes! It's me—Magic Words guy Chris Ward. And the Halloween season is my favorite time of year. Why, it seems like yesterday when the elastic in my "Mider-Man mask" (I had trouble saying Spider-Man, okay?) was cutting into my head as I separated the heavenly Hershey's bars from the hellish Circus Peanuts. And, now that I think of it, it *was* yesterday. What can I say? I've got a relaxed attitude towards wearing vintage children's costumes to work. So, in the Hallow's Eve spirit, let me put on my spooky hat this month and answer a letter about...Christmas? Man, you guys ruin all my fun.

Wizard,
How on Earth did the Batman Christmas song get invented? You know, "Jingle bells, Batman smells..."

CODY TUCKER
xjedix89@mchsi.com

You know, every time little Cody here approaches me with sleep in his eyes—tripping over his oversized Batman jammies as he scampers along—and begins tugging at my pants leg asking this question, I just can't resist. After all, it's the Christmas season. What? It's October? *Git the hell offa me, ya little rug rat!* I don't have yer answer, kid, but writer and Batman expert Scott Beatty (*The Batman Handbook: The Ultimate Training Manual*) does! "Given the punning nature, this has the Riddler's stamp all over it," says Beatty. "And for out-and-out cheese factor, I wouldn't rule out Joel Schumacher. Although I can't imagine that it's the first—or the last—offending rhyme, pun or limerick written about the Dark Knight. Even Alfred knows one or two."

The answer's gotta be out there—if anyone knows this song's origin, write in and let us know! Now on to a letter more appropriate of the Witching Season...

Wizard,
One correction for issue #166: In the "Girl Power" section, you say "Dark Water" is Jennifer Connelly's first horror film. It's not. An earlier film from 1985 is "Creepers," a.k.a. "Phenomena," directed by Dario Argento and co-starring Donald Pleasence.

ROB ERIKSON
North Brunswick, N.J.

Holy cats, you're right. In the film from cult Italian horror-master Argento, Connelly played a girl who could communicate with insects! Just one year later she'd communicate with Muppets in "Labyrinth"—which you might argue isn't a horror film, but I'll dare you to ask anyone who was 5 years old in 1986 to tell you different.

The one thing you're wrong about is that the movie *co-stars* Donald Pleasence. I maintain that anytime Pleasence's bald, lazy-eyed, classically trained visage appears in a film, he instantly commands the spotlight.

ENVELOPE ART

ROBERT LUCIANO New Rochelle, N.Y.

QUICKHITS

Your Terry and Rachel Dodson babe spread in *Wizard* #167 was jaw-dropping. Girls + hoses = happy reader.

JOSHUA WILLIS
just_hitched05@yahoo.com

Holy cats! I don't know what stunned me more: the awesome villains spread in your *Infinite Crisis* preview [*Wizard* #167] or the fact that Psycho-Pirate is with them.

D. TRAN
photogorama44@gmail.com

You recently asked on your Website for people to vote on the best Batman movie. When I saw "Batman and Robin" on the list, I threw up in my mouth a little.

MIKE LEVY
Wolcott, Conn.

Can you please bring back the Mort of the Month?

SAM LARKIN
Destrehan, La.

Since Hal Jordon is back in costume, it must be only a matter of time till they bring back Pieface. Maybe they could call it *Pieface: Rebaked.*

MARK COSBY
knpgy99@sbcglobal.net

Hawkeye died. He came back. I'm sure we're all very surprised.

KARL HUNGUS
SgtAnjayl@aol.com

Eric Powell is one of the most creative people in comics today. Crazy genius!

BOB ESSEX
bobessex@xtra.co.nz

Whatever happened to the whole "Millar World" inter-company crossover? I see two of the titles finished, but the four one-shots from Image (and *The Unfunnies*) never seemed to come around or wrap up.

J. MILCIK
shyguy@funbags.com

Here's hoping the new "V For Vendetta" movie written by the Wachowski Bros. is better than their last film.

BENN P.
phantasm_82@hotmail.com

You mean to tell me DC Comics can bring dead heroes back from the dead but can't make Barbara Gordon walk again?

O. MORA
deadlaff@yahoo.com

We attended Wizard World Chicago 2005. Many lifelong dreams were fulfilled when we met such comic heavyweights as Margot Kidder, Virgil, Twizted and that guy from "Ocean's II." Can you say *euphoria*?

SEAN AND PORK CHOP
Minneapolis, Minn.

What do you think of THIS issue? Let us know. Send an e-mail to magicwords@wizarduniverse.com and be heard...er, read.

Wizard,
I've been thinking about the "Spider-Man 3" movie villains, and I think maybe the Vulture would be a good one. Ben Kingsley might make a good Vulture, too. What do you think?

DUSTIN V.
dustinv@bellsouth.net

I would say that's a spot-on casting choice in lieu of the late, great Donald Pleasence—star of "Halloween" I, 2, 4, 5 and 6 and "Escape to Witch Mountain"! Okay, I know...enough with the Pleasence pleasantries. Sir Ben Kingsley would definitely be my No. I choice to play Marvel's oldest birdman. He might even make the character seem...oh, I don't know...100 percent less completely ridiculous.

I think it's potentially the best casting choice since Patrick Stewart landed Xavier! Sure, Kingsley is known for his hoity-toity, respectable roles like in "House of Sand and Fog," but there's gotta be a way to convince him to get in a green leotard and dangle from a rope in front of a green screen. I mean, the guy was in "Thunderbirds," for crying out loud...so one more "bird"-related role can't kill him.

Dear geeks,
I was reading some comics from the '70s the other day, and for the first time I realized that they've stopped using thought balloons for inner monologue. When did it happen? I didn't even notice, and I've been reading comics for over 16 years. When did the thought box become the trend? I think that a memorial should be held for the death of the thought balloon.

BRIAN JENNZAPOR
brianjennzapor@msn.com

Well, I'll say a few words. We gather here today to mourn the loss of the thought balloon, preceded in death by the cheap, newsprint paper it once called home and survived by the phrase "Stan Lee Proudly Presents..."

Hey, waitaminute...the thought balloon's not quite dead yet!

"I used them in my last few issues of *Fantastic Four* because it just seemed stupid to me that Johnny Storm would be talking out loud to himself in the void of space," says writer and comic history buff Mark Waid. "What made thought balloons seem old-fashioned was never their look; it was that bad writers used to fill them with tons of clunky exposition."

And, to paraphrase the Talking Heads, how did they get here?

"I don't know that anyone can point at a specific panel and say, 'That was the first thought balloon' since we're considering not only comic books but comic strips. That said, the thought balloons as we know them today didn't really take form until the 1940s—comics creators were still inventing and refining the language and experimenting. Before that, thought balloons hadn't yet been defined with their 'cloud shape,' and thoughts were often simply indicated by parentheses and quotation marks inside regular balloons. But by the early '40s, the 'cloud shape' became the accepted common shorthand."

Wow—put *that* in your balloon and think it!

DIDJA KNOW?

Until Mark Waid's *FF* #519 (below), a speech or thought balloon hadn't been used on an *FF* cover for 62 issues.

WEIRDOMAIL

To Magic Words,

Do I get a "No-Prize" as a famous geek? I was once lucky enough to be out with a beautiful girl. I let her know if we made out I had to be watching "Smallville." The other day, a lady pal mentioned going out. I chose to see "Fantastic Four" alone. *Why* do I choose superheroes over the warmth and companionship of women?

RICHARD M. BROWN
Detroit, Mich.

You know, this letter is actually *really* funny if you imagine it's a comedian bombing, and not a depressing and disturbingly real letter. "Last week I kissed a girl...*and then I turned the page and kissed another*! Zoom! Hello? Is this thing on?"

That's how I choose to view poor, poor Dick Brown's letter here. Also, I choose to look up Dick Brown's name in the phone book, read it as it just as it appears and laugh heartily over cocktails.

Dear Wizard,

I saw "Fantastic Four" and it's okay, it just doesn't soar. And the changes to Dr. Doom just seemed arbitrary—sticking to the source material is usually a safe bet if it's managed to stick around for the last 40+ years.

Speaking of movies, I like to stand in front of the automatic doors at the grocery store, and pretend I'm using the Force to open them. It's a lot of fun, and people seem to be really impressed, because they're always staring.

RUSSELL KIRKMAN
Austin, Texas

Dude. Russell. My man. Until this letter, I thought I was the only one who used the Force to open automatic doors. It cracks me up to no end. Jedi high-five! Still, the cashier almost never finds it funny when I toss a case of Schlitz on the counter and whisper, "You don't need to see my identification." Where were we...oh yes, the "Fantastic Four" movie! Call me crazy, but I *loved* it. And apparently so did roughly 5.6 million other Americans, who spent $10 each to see the film on its opening weekend. I loved "FF" for its cool parts (pitch-perfect Human Torch!), and I loved it for its so-dumb-it's-funny parts (a handy-dandy cosmic ray machine! How convenient!). I loved it when Jessica Alba stripped down for no reason and loved the soundtrack because it was cheesier than "Rocky 4." Critically speaking, the film's just not as good as "Batman Begins"—but for my money I enjoyed it more. That's right. I said it. Bring it on, fandom! But keep in mind, I've seen "Road House" over 100 times and have never seen "The Godfather." That's how I roll, bee-yotch. And here's another reason I cheered for "FF"...

Hey Staff Writer Richard Ho!

I see that you got credit on **www.imdb.com** for your role as a reporter extra in "Fantastic Four." But I also see that this is not your first movie credit! Care to explain what the heck the Alfred Cheung-directed, Chinese flick "Biao jie, ni hao ye! 4 zhi qing bu zi jin" (translated: "Her Fatal Ways 4") is all about, and what you did during its production in 1994?

ROBERT C. HURST
rchurst@sbcglobal.net

Well, as we all know, "Her Fatal Ways 4" ties up the sloppy loose ends left by "Her Fatal Ways" I through 3. Except most people don't consider the lackluster "Her Fatal Ways 3" in canon because...well, that's a discussion for another time. But, yes, the Ho-dog is a man of many talents (staff writer, movie extra and former Magic Words scribe!). Ain't that right, Rich?

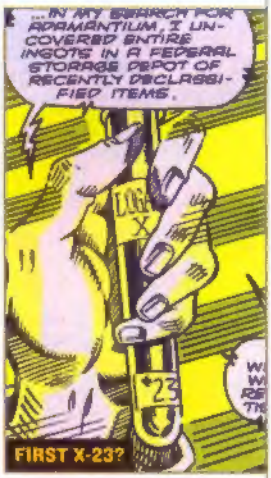
"Gosh, that brings back memories!" says the Ho. "Yes, it's true—at the ripe old age of 14, I served as the musical composer for that fine piece of Chinese cinema. It was a heady time, my first foray into the magical world of movies—filled with drugs, hookers and the sweetest violin melodies you can imagine."

Riiight. And speaking of mistaken identities...

Hey guys,

I stumbled upon a copy of *Wolverine* #80 (series I, 1994), and low and behold—could it be—the first glimpse of X-23? The book features a panel of a doctor holding a vile with X-23 stamped on it, so could this be the first mention of X-23 that no one seems to know about? Wowsers! It must be!

LEELAND HUNGUS
Halifax, Nova Scotia



This odd little bit of X-23 trivia has been making the rounds on Internet message boards, but X-23 creator Craig Kyle says he has "no idea" what people are talking about. What say you, *Supergirl* artist Ian Churchill, who penciled the issue in question? Is it a fluke?

"It is indeed the first mention of X-23!" claims Churchill. "*Wolverine* #80...I remember it well. [Writer] Larry [Hama] had it all meticulously planned to gently build—over 10 years—and come to fruition by 2004, but [former Marvel Editor-in-Chief] Bob Harras felt that such a long-term plan at that time could limit the scope of stories in the short term. As it turns out he was absolutely correct, and we all benefited by the excellent X-related stories that followed. So, well done, Lee, for spotting it. I'm sure a Marvel No-Prize is proudly heading your way!"

And, hey Leeland, Ian would also like you to give him a call this week—it was either something about a bridge he has for sale in Brooklyn, or how you can make millions working from home.

Hey Ward,

It's official—Bendis has gone insane! Well, either that or he hasn't slept for two years because of a 20-book-a-month workload. I understand that it's not the *real* Marvel U. [in

COMEDIAN PHOTO HERE

House of M], but I think it's still too early to bring Hawkeye back. Also, a real problem for me occurred after reading *New Avengers* #7. Come on, *Paul f---kin' Jenkins is part of the story*?! Although he's a great writer, Jenkins should remain just that—a writer! So now is Spidey like, "Hey, I loved that whole Venom thing you did on *Spectacular* with Humberto Ramos." And now can Wolverine approach him and say, "Hey bub...I got a buncha questions for you. First off, who's this Rose broad I keep dreamin' 'bout?"

PATRICK MELARAGNO
Columbus, Ohio

P.S. Who is the Mystery Ninja?

"Is that you, [*New Avengers* Editor] Tom Brevoort?" wonders Bendis, staring accusingly at this letter. "You don't have to write letters to *Wizard*. My assistant got your message."

Well Patrick Melaragno...Melagaron...Meegalarron—whatever your name really is—Bendis understands your problem with Paul Jenkins showing up in the story.

"I totally agree with this guy," says Bendis, folding like a card table. "What can I say? I asked Grant Morrison to be in the story and he said no. And fine...you really want to know who the 'mystery Ronin' is? It's Paul Jenkins. And that feeling you just had? You just pooped your pants."

Cool! I thought I was the only one.

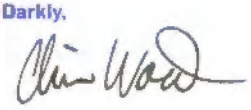
Hey,
The product's name: Rash Guard
The price: USD 5.00/pc (with shipping cost)
The qty: 200 pcs
The size: S, M, L and XL

WINNIE
winnieshop888@yahoo.com.cn

Wow, thanks Winnie! In under 50 words, Winnie has just informed me I can now buy Rash Guard (in bulk quantities of 200 units) in all sizes. Good lookin' out, Winnie...you soulless spamming automaton, you. Now multiply this letter times 5,000, replace the product's name with items like "snow jacket" and "rubber bands," and you'll start to realize why I miss stationary and stamps. Just thought I'd share that.

All right folks, these Mars Bars ain't gonna eat themselves. See you in 43,200 minutes starting...now!

Darkly,



Chris Ward

Ever danced with Staff Writer Chris Ward in the pale moonlight? You should try it. Oh, and send him candy, too. He likes Butterfingers and Caramellos.

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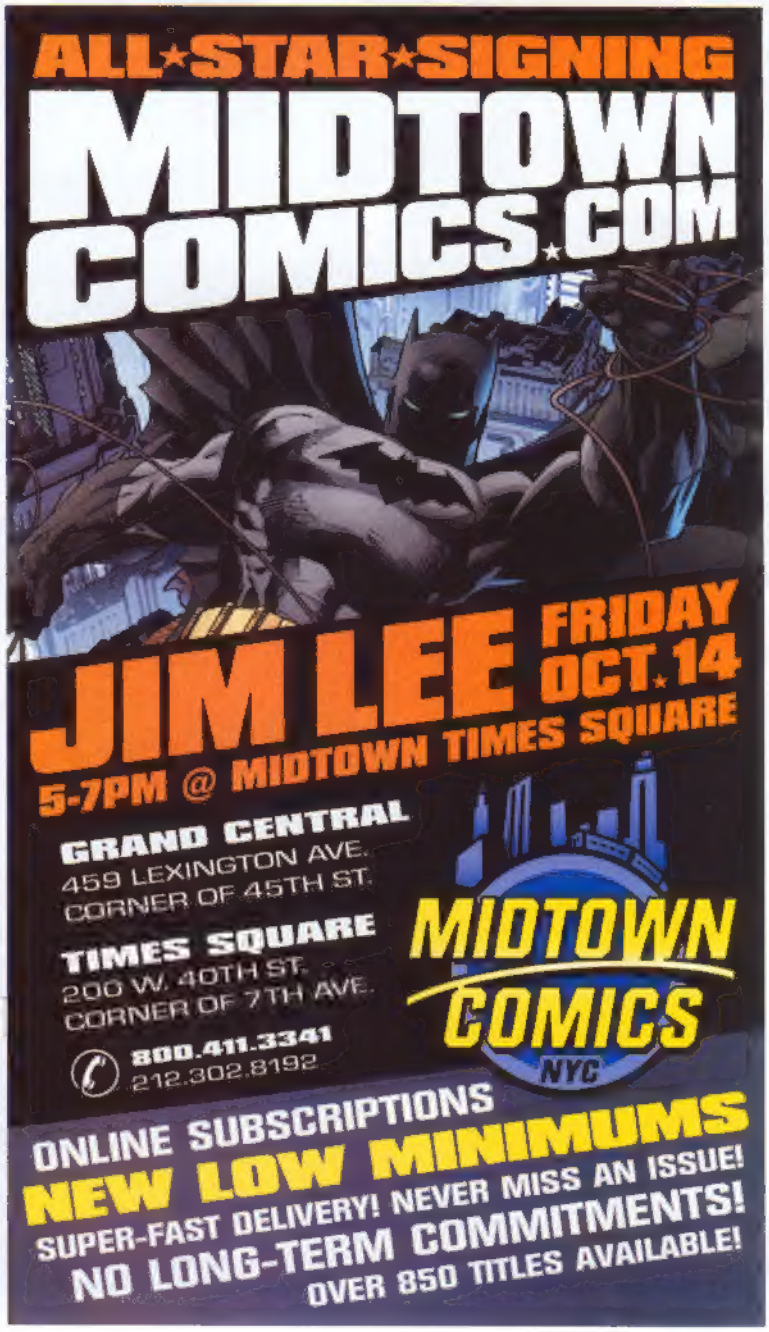


MARVEL GOES DANIEL'S WAY

Two-timing writer sets up both Hulk, Wolvie for monster 2006

HULKING UP Daniel Way's gritty writing style fits the Green Goliath like a snug pair of purple cutoffs.

Two of the Marvel Universe's deadliest heroes are about to have a hell of a lot more in common than berserker rages, destructive impulses and killer attitudes.

Both Wolverine and the Hulk will head for unexplored territory this November when each solo title kicks off epic storylines with major consequences for the longtime rivals—and both storylines will be written by Daniel Way.

Following the conclusion of his three-issue *House of M* tie-in arc on *Wolverine*, the talented scribe behind past projects such as *Venom* and *Bullseye: Greatest Hits* will guide the destiny of the feral Canuck for the next year as Logan embarks on an epic quest starting with *Wolverine* #36. That very same month starting with issue #88, Way debuts a four-issue fill-in arc on *The Incredible Hulk* which sets up the gamma-powered goliath for big things to come in 2006.

With the keys to both Marvel icons in his hands, Way has become the newest go-to guy in the House of Ideas' stable of talent.

"*Bullseye: Greatest Hits* knocked people's socks off around here, and it also got the right type of buzz amongst the right type of writers," said Marvel Knights editor Axel Alonso. "Garth Ennis, J. Michael Straczynski and Mark Millar really like what he does, which means a lot. Daniel isn't the kind of writer you tap to re-launch *Power Pack*. He excels with characters whose scars run deep, whose souls are conflicted and who have a few—or a few thousand—skeletons in their closet."

DANIEL WAY

"I feel honored," said Way. "For them to put that much trust in me with these characters, that's pretty cool."

Way plans on sending Wolverine, fresh from the traumatic after-effects of *House of M*, on an around-the-world journey in search of something—or someone—named Muramasa. The mystery of Muramasa will continue to unravel over the course of 10 to 12 issues, as Way explores Logan's new status quo within the Marvel Universe.

Angry face fails to offset kitty-cat ears
"I'm the best there is at—hey, quit laughing..." page 180

Batman tells off-color joke
Immediately punched into lake by Wonder Woman...
page 192

"I pitched Marvel on this story a while ago, but the proposal evolved over the course of six months," said Way. "And when it all started to gel, we realized we could use it as a springboard to do all these huge things. This isn't just setting up the next couple of years—this is going to set up what we can do with the character for the next *50* years."

Both Marvel and Way are staying quiet on story specifics, but one thing is certain: the quest will put Wolverine face-to-face with his own mortality. "What Mark Millar did with Wolverine was brilliant, switching the paradigm and having him go up against all the good guys," raved Way. "But it also highlighted just how dangerous Wolverine really is. He's a devastating weapon, and he won't stop because he's not going to die. So I wanted to introduce something that could be his equal. What if he knew there was something out there that could take him out? Would he hide from it? Or would he take the initiative? That's what this quest is all about."

Meanwhile, Way will be launching the Hulk on a quest of his own, as the volatile hero finds himself embroiled in an adventure that takes him from the frozen wastes of Alaska to the cold depths of outer space. "It begins with Bruce Banner having removed himself from society and living way up in Northern Alaska," said Way. "But Nick Fury is looking for him, because he wants to recruit him for a mission. And obviously, if you're going to ask the Hulk to do something for you, you have to approach softly."

A WOLF AT THE DOOR Way promises a twist that'll scare Logan worse than a steroid test.

Faced with a choice between saving the world and being its greatest threat, Banner agrees to help the S.H.I.E.L.D. head honcho and accepts the mission.

"There's a Cold War-era weapon in space, and on board this thing is a sensitive little piece of A.I. that's gone rogue," explained Way. "Fury needs to take it out, and Hulk is particularly suited to do this because this thing can beat anything high-tech. Spaceships, guided missiles, Iron Man—none of it will work. So they go with the most low-tech weapon ever invented: the Hulk."

But as Banner soon finds out, the mission is far from a simple search-and-smash. "Unfortunately, everything S.H.I.E.L.D. told him is a bunch of f—ing lies," said Way. "He realizes this when he gets into space, but by that point it's too late. Now it's do or die. And either way, he's screwed."

And while Way won't divulge the ending of the four-issue arc, he does confirm that this won't be the end of the line for ol' Jade Jaws—and that the trip to outer space may have far-reaching consequences for the rest of the Marvel U.

"This storyline was originally going to be a separate mini-series, but everybody involved loved the ending so much that it really got the wheels turning," revealed Way. "Marvel was considering what they wanted to do with the Hulk in the next year, and those plans are going to jump off the end of my story." ■ **RICHARD HO**

'LOST' AND FOUND

MARVEL TAPS TELEVISION SCRIBE TO PEN 'ULTIMATE HULK VS. WOLVERINE'

The writer and co-creator of the hit TV series "Lost" has found a new home—Marvel's Ultimate Universe.

Damon Lindelof will make the leap from screen to panel this December with the launch of *Ultimate Hulk vs. Wolverine*, a six-issue mini-series with artist Leinil Yu that details the first earth-shaking meeting between the Ultimate versions of Marvel's most destructive duo. With Bruce Banner on the run following his escape from execution in *Ultimates 2*, Wolverine is sent to hunt down the unstable scientist-turned-monster and bring him in—by any means necessary.

"Nick Fury comes to Logan and says, 'We've got a situation here,'" said Lindelof, a longtime comics fan who considers a copy of *Incredible Hulk* #181, featuring the first meeting between Wolverine and Hulk in the regular Marvel U., among his most prized possessions. "The Hulk killed 800 people in Manhattan, there was a big public trial and he was executed. He's supposed to be dead. But he's actually alive, and Fury needs Logan to take care of it."

Expect Lindelof to live up to the promise of the book's title. "I personally hate 'versus' books where the characters fight for an issue and then team up to take down a common foe," said the writer. "If the book is called *Ultimate Hulk vs. Wolverine*, people want to see them fighting."

The titanic tussles will be brought to life by Yu, who tackles his first project since signing exclusive with Marvel. "He's an amazing artist and such a great storyteller," said Lindelof. "When you look in his characters' eyes when they're talking to each other, you really get a sense of real emotion and who they are. It's not just about the action—which he's also quite brilliant at. There's a real uniqueness to his style which is so cool."

For Lindelof, the transition from TV writing to penning comic scripts has been smooth—a lot smoother than that ill-fated flight at the beginning of his hit ABC series, at least. "What's so liberating about writing for comics is that you're not beholden to anything other than your imagination," said Lindelof. "And what's really exciting to me is that these characters are so iconic. Wolverine was first introduced in a Hulk comic, and readers who are being introduced to comics now through the Ultimate Universe are getting a chance to see them meet for the first time all over again!" ■ RH

OFF THE ISLAND With art by Yu, "Lost" co-creator Lindelof digs his claws into Ultimate Wolverine.

THE CRISIS CONTINUES

'Infinite Crisis' one-shots to continue story from 'Countdown' minis

The countdown to *Infinite Crisis* may be over, but the chaos it created will prove too big for just one title.

The OMAC Project, *Villains United*, *Day of Vengeance* and *Rann/Thanagar War* will each receive their own 32-page one-shot over the course of *Infinite Crisis*. All four creative teams from the minis plan to helm the respective specials, to be released in conjunction with major story beats of *Infinite Crisis*.

Following the events of *OMAC Project*, Checkmate still lives, but in ruins, much like the relationship between the government and superhumans. Several surprising players will join Batman in the search for answers—and payback.

"After Max Lord's folly, the world is more hostile, and so are the heroes," writer Greg Rucka explained.

The *Villains United* special shifts the primary focus from the Secret Six to the Society and some dissension in the ranks, with the likes of Bizarro, Solomon Grundy and Lady Shiva making their presences felt.

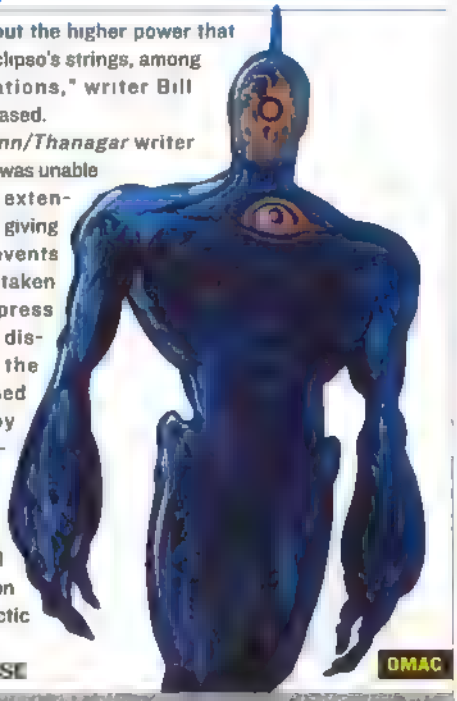
"This is a big story that is going to show what happens when incredibly powerful and strong-willed people disagree," writer Gail Simone promised.

Similarly, in the *Day of Vengeance* special, the Shadowpact shares the spotlight with a group of big gun DC mystics, composed of Dr. Fate, Zatanna, Madame Xanadu and the Phantom Stranger, joining the fray against the Spectre

"We find out the higher power that was pulling Eclipso's strings, among other revelations," writer Bill Willingham teased.

While *Rann/Thanagar* writer Dave Gibbons was unable to comment extensively without giving away story events that had not taken place as of press time, he did disclose that the newly returned Donna Troy would be joining her old flame, Green Lantern Kyle Rayner, as well as Hawkman on the intergalactic front lines.

■ BEN MORSE



OMAC

SHEDDING LIGHT ON ULTIMATE VISION

While the Ultimate Universe gears up for possible extinction in the near future, Mark Millar eyes a Vision of the past.

This November, the *Ultimates 2* scribe re-teams with *Wolverine* collaborator John Romita Jr. to herald the origin story of Ultimate Vision, the doomsaying android first introduced in the pages of *Ultimate Nightmare* to warn the heroes of the impending arrival of Gah Lak Tus. Functioning as a prelude to Warren Ellis' epic trilogy of Ultimate mini-series—the third arc, *Ultimate Extinction*, kicks off in December—*Ultimate Vision* will be told as a series of three eight-page back-up stories running in November's *Ultimate Spider-Man* #86, *Ultimate X-Men* #65 and *Ultimate Fantastic Four* #25, which will not be reprinted in a subsequent trade paperback.

The kicker? Each issue will be printed flipbook-style, with a second cover drawn by superstar artist Michael Turner.

"Warren had introduced this amazing Ultimate version of Vision, and we knew we had something way more interesting than we had room for," said Ultimate editor John Barber. "When we mentioned the idea to Mark, he pushed it even further, showing exactly what the character was doing with Gah Lak Tus. We also wanted to give a little something extra to the readers of the monthly books, without doing a big crossover that forces you to buy a bunch of books you ordinarily wouldn't. This story fits the bill. It adds dimension to the Ultimate Galactus trilogy without cluttering things up!" ■ RH

THE FACE OF DOOM Do androids dream of electric dermatologists? We're guessing that Gah Lak Tus' herald Ultimate Vision does.

5 QUESTIONS WITH...

MANDY AMANO—THE HOTTEST FANGIRL ALIVE!

Cooler than the soda she wiggled her bum for in Pepsi ads (mandyamano.com) and hot enough to strut in a *Maxim* photo spread, Mandy Amano melted our hearts to become the hottest fangirl in the nation! But don't think this 26-year-old, half-Japanese, half-Irish Texas native fakes her fandom. Between boyfriend David Mack and a youth immersed in the art form, she knows her way around a comic shop.

Beckett Comics' Jeff Amano is your dad, so you had comics everywhere, right?

Absolutely. We had artwork on the walls from artists like Frank Frazetta and characters like Wolverine. Dad had boxes of comics around the house and there were trips to the comic store.

What's the reaction you get when you tell people you read comics?

One time, I was in a comic store and I was a little dolled up because I'd just come from an audition. This really bashful guy comes up to me and he won't even look at me, he was just staring at the floor. And he asks me, "Um do you like comic books?" I told him, "Yes, I love them." And he yells, "Oh my God!" and runs out the door

What titles do you love snatching up?

I just picked up the first *Fables* trade and I've gotten turned onto *Y: The Last Man*, and I love *Runaways* as well. Also, [Oni Press'] *Courtney Crumrin*! It's so witty and so freaking cute. But there're also those tried and true books. I've always been a fan of *Powers*, *Sin City*, *Strangers In Paradise* and *Sandman*. I love "Batman: Year One" and *Dark Knight Returns*.

Do you get recognized at cons since you posed for the cover of *Kabuki* #5?

Yeah, people will buy that issue or they'll buy the prints of the painting [David] did of me as Death for the CBLDF auction, and they'll ask me to sign it and I'm like, "Really?" [*Laughs*] It's fun!

Do people go bonkers when they see you at shows?

I had this one guy put his arm around me and he tried to hold my hand like we were taking a prom picture. It was weird and I was like, "First of all get your hands off me and second of all, why would you want to pose like we were in a prom?" It was the whole stiff back and clasping of the hands and it was so awkward. [*Laughs*]

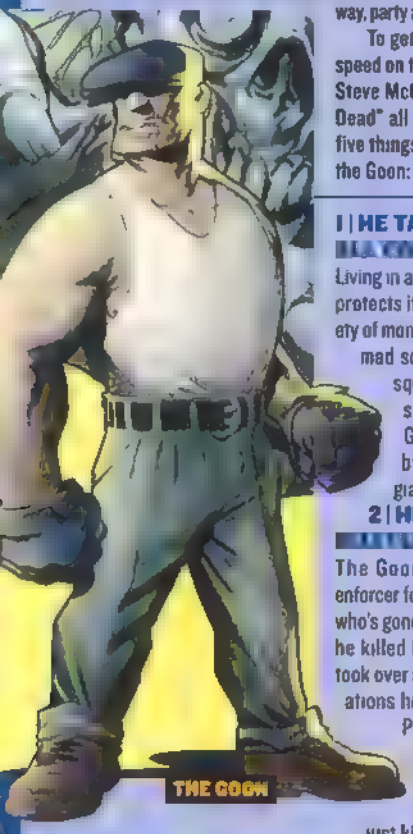
■ RICKEY PURDIN

For more photos of Amano, visit wizarduniverse.com.

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE GOON

Screw All Hallow's Eve—October is Goon Month, baby! And to celebrate, Dark Horse rolls out a slew of releases, from a special 25-cent reprint of writer/artist Eric Powell's self-published *The Goon* #1 from 2002 (with an all-new cover and back-up story by Powell) to *The Goon: Fancy Pants Edition* hardcover (which finally collects the Goon's origin issues in chronological order).

So why does the Goon get a full 30 days to party down? "'Cuz I demanded it!" said Powell. "I threw a major prima donna hissy fit to get my own month. And it's not just a promotional gimmick! The month is now called Goon. By the way, party at my house Goon the 15th."



To get all of you newbies up to speed on the bruiser who's Hellboy, Steve McQueen and "Shaun of the Dead" all rolled into one, here are five things you need to know about the Goon:

1 | HE TAKES ON [illegible]

Living in an unnamed city, the Goon protects its denizens from all variety of monsters: zombies, vampires, mad scientists, airborne giant squid, robots, etc. He even squares off with a Godzilla-esque giant lizard by transforming into a giant ape!

2 | HE'S A CRIMINAL [illegible]

The Goon claims to act as an enforcer for the crime boss Labrazio who's gone into hiding, when in fact he killed Labrazio years ago and took over all of his debts and operations himself! But according to Powell, "His true area of expertise is the fine art of smashing small animals with bricks." He's just kidding folks! We hope...

3 | HE HAS THE BEST [illegible]

From Zombie Priest (who controls all of the town's undead) to the metallic genius Dr. Alloy (who had the Goon thrown in the clink) to hook-handed Fishy Pete (whose own sea-monster mother tried to take the Goon to bed), there's no shortage of kickass villains in the Goon's world.

4 | HIS [illegible]

Don't be fooled by childhood pal Franky's short stature; he'll mix it up with brawlers 10 times his size or stick a knife in the eye of a giant squid quicker than you can say, "I need back-up!"

5 | HE HAS A [illegible]

They say behind every great man there's a great woman, and Powell's teased a disastrous event (that occurred in the mysterious "Chinatown") involving the Goon and the dame he loved that still torments him. Powell will tackle this story outside of the bi-monthly *Goon* book. "I'm working on the *Chinatown* graphic novel right now," Powell teased. "I hope to have it done by next summer." Until then, good thing the Goon can relieve his stress by punching out zombie chimps. ■ JESSE THOMPSON

CHARACTER TO WATCH: LEX LUTHOR

[illegible]

Nope.

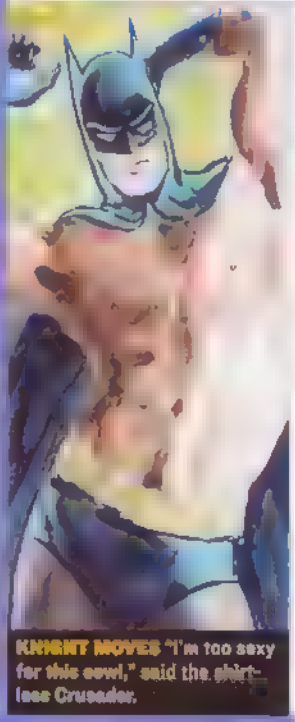
"[illegible] Lex Luthor's head up to schemes from the bottom to destroy the DC Universe. Up until *Wonder Woman* #208 we thought Max Lord had earned the spot of DC's top puppet master...but we think Luthor is primed to call the shots again. Not only is he still the head of the Secret Society in *Villains United*, but there's that little unresolved panel from *Superman/Batman* #8 with Lex speaking "There will be a reckoning...a CRISIS." Writer Josh Lieb publicly teased this issue out, as did DC in its *Prelude to Infinite Crisis* one-shot.

"Luthor's role in *Infinite Crisis* is gigantic," [illegible] writer Geoff Johns. "He's one of the biggest characters in *Crisis*, and he's gotta be. He's the ultimate villain in the DC Universe, so he has to have a big role. That said, there's a huge twist to it." Part of that huge twist may be found in October's conclusion to *Villains United*, said writer Gail Simone, where Luthor's still gathering his villainous army as head of the Society. "In *Villains United* #6, Luthor faces a life-changing threat he could never have imagined," said Simone.

■ CHRIS WARD

QUEER AS BAT-FOLK

DC's gay-dar targets irony-laden artwork

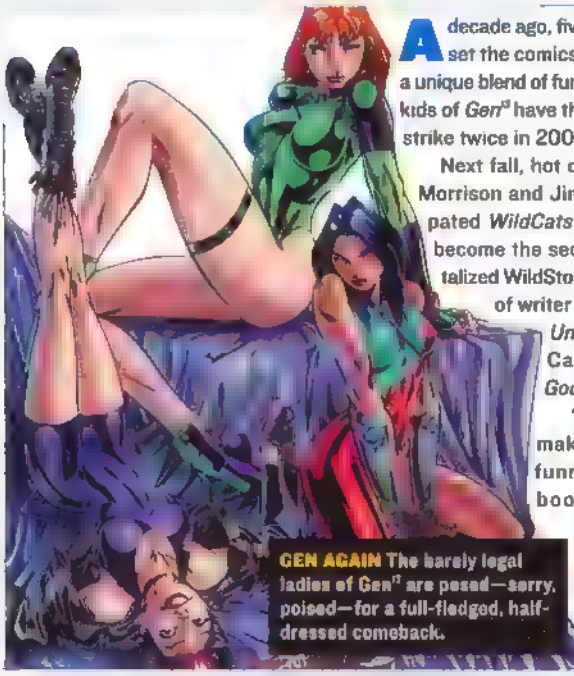


KNIGHT MOVES "I'm too sexy for this cowl," said the shirtless Crusader.

What's gay about dressing up in tight spandex and training sweaty, firm young boys in revealing shorts? I know—we don't see the connection either. But artist Mark Chamberlain forgoes double entendres and gets straight to the point (or maybe not so straight, actually) in his series of watercolor paintings, "Queer Batman." Recently, DC ordered the copyright-infringing, ironic man-boy-love fun to be removed from the Kathleen Cullen Fine Arts gallery in Manhattan, fuming over images that have the ambiguous duo posed in homoerotic situations (read: bare-bottomed and lettin' it all hang out). Shortly after, DC also ordered itself to rewrite every Batman and Robin comic book wherein the duo engage in homoerotic situations, a task which should be completed by 2158. ■ CW

NEXT GEN-ERATION

Simone promises 'hottest, funniest, scariest team book on stands'



GEN AGAIN The barely legal ladies of Gen[13] are posed—sorry, poised—for a full-fledged, half-dressed comeback.

A decade ago, five rambunctious teens set the comics industry ablaze with a unique blend of fun and sex appeal. If the kids of *Gen*[13] have their way, lightning will strike twice in 2006.

Next fall, hot on the heels of Grant Morrison and Jim Lee's highly anticipated *WildCats* re-launch, *Gen*[13] will become the second title in the revitalized WildStorm Universe, courtesy of writer Gail Simone (*Villains United*) and artist Talent Caldwell (*Superman: Godfall*).

"Our mission is to make *Gen*[13] the hottest, funniest, scariest team book on the stands," Simone enthused. "I'm excited to show how cool these characters can be to a new generation of readers who enjoy half-naked superheroes."

The new series will feature the original core group of Fairchild, Grunge, Freefall, Burnout and Rainmaker, as well as a wealth of new characters and villains designed by Caldwell.

"I'd seen Talent's *Superman* work and found it really expressive and energized, but it didn't prepare me in the least for the stuff he's doing now," said Simone. "It's superstar stuff, like watching an action blockbuster with an unlimited budget."

Simone and Caldwell recognize they have big shoes to fill, but they hope not only to replicate the success of the original *Gen*[13], but also to push the envelope even further.

"I've been hoping to do a book with some humor, where I could go a bit nuts," Simone explained. "It will be like a great teen movie but with tanks flying through the air. If Fredric Wertham has a grandson, hopefully he'll hate this book." ■ BM

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THE GREAT DEBATE

ARE THERE TOO MANY LINE-WIDE CROSSOVERS AND TIE-INS?

YES

It would've been great to open up my copy of *OMAC Project* #4 and know what the hell was going on. But unfortunately, that wasn't the case, as I saw Max Lord lying on the ground with a snapped neck instead of the cliffhanger I was teased with at the end of issue #3. Turns out I hadn't read *Wonder Woman* #219 yet, and there was no spoiler warning or indication that I needed to do so before picking up *OMAC* #4. Gah! Trumped by a tie-in!

Don't get me wrong—I'm just as impressed as anyone that there's such a newfound cohesiveness within the DC Universe, and that Marvel's making an effort for *House of M* to have ramifications throughout all of the Marvel U. factions. But the fact of the matter remains: There are just far too many tie-in issues. Just look at *Spider-Man: House of M*—the events in that series don't even seem to correspond with what's going on in the focal *House of M* series. (So wait—Spider-Man's the Green Goblin? I'm confused...which I become I probably didn't need to read it in the first place.) DC and Marvel are telling me I need every single tie-in. Meanwhile, my wallet's telling me I'm afraid I'm going to listen to the fourth time, guys. ■ JT

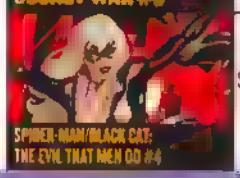
NO

[illegible] invoked by Marvel and DC over this past summer and well into fall—is precisely why so many fans love this medium. You can find this nowhere else: not television, not movies, not even anime for all its hype and fervor. Fans don't just pick up Batman or Wolverine to read a good tale of that character, but for how that character ties to a greater universe of heroes. A great issue of *Wonder Woman* should make you want to know not just more about the character, but about the world she inhabits, and DC's lead-ins to *Infinite Crisis* such as *OMAC*, *Villains United* and *Day of Vengeance* don't just give me a kick-ass tale of space wars, villainous killers and crazed robots, but make me want to go back and read old JLI stories and jump into series such as *JSA*, *JLA* and...dare I say it, even *Birds of Prey*! (I once loathed female protagonists, but now, I love Oracle, Black Canary and crowd. But I still think girls are icky.) Sure, not all of the tie-ins matter, some are a mere mention, but no one says every fan has to buy every [illegible]. In fact one of the things DC has done so brilliantly is [illegible] a complete story in every issue without forcing me to buy more tie-ins...but I still buy them, because they're simply that [illegible]

Darth Zoid ■ MIKE COTTON

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

October and November see the release of three of comicdom's most delayed—and most patiently fan anticipated—projects of all time. Check out those overdue puppies below... and see what the hubbub is about!

PROJECT	ORIGINALLY SHIPPING	NOW SHIPPING	REASON DELAYED	REASON TO BUY
	March 2002	November 2005	Todd McFarlane couldn't pencil his Spawn story in just 10 years and instead took 13 and a half.	Originally intended to commemorate Image's 10th anniversary, this long-awaited hardcover boasts the never-before-seen origin of the Savage Dragon and McFarlane's first published pencils in a decade!
	February 2005	October 2005	Italian painter Gabriele Dell'Otto must have spilled espresso in his acrylics, or maybe wine or something, whatever.	Given the prominence Nick Fury's enjoyed in books such as *Astonishing X-Men*, *Wolverine* and *Captain America*, it's pretty safe to say *Secret War* was meant to cast him as a major Marvel player. And with the tantalizing possibility of a major secret being revealed, we can't wait!
	September 2002	December 2005... ?	Writer/filmmaker/actor Kevin Smith was too busy watching "Degrassi: The Next Generation"—and then appearing in three episodes himself—to turn in his Marvel scripts on time.	Reason to buy?!? Brother, you've got cheesecake penciler Terry Dodson filling out Felicia Hardy's luscious zip-up black leather catsuit! Hmm, the, uh the zipper doesn't go up all... uh, all the way. Sorry, were you saying something? We were distracted.

HOW THE WEST WAS FUN

'Jonah Hex' writer Jimmy Palmiotti rounds up his favorite Westerns

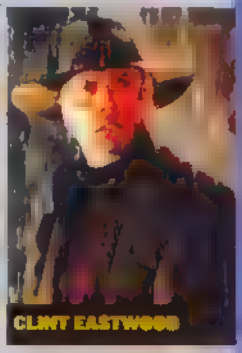
With the return of one of the greatest Western comic characters of all time this November, Jonah Hex, *Wizard* sat down with series writer Jimmy Palmiotti to get the dirt on the top Westerns that influenced him over the years. "My only regret is that I can only pick four," Palmiotti chuckled. Saddle up!

UNFORGIVEN (1992)

"Clint Eastwood at the top of his game. One of my favorites of all time. Western or otherwise. To be able to write, direct and star in something this brilliant says a lot about the man. Morgan Freeman and Gene Hackman deliver the goods as well."

FAVORITE LINE:

BILL MUNNY: "Hell of a thing, killin' a man. Take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have."



CLINT EASTWOOD

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST (1968)

"Outlandish, overblown and mythic all at the same time, this is epic filmmaking from one of the greats—Sergio Leone. Henry Fonda and Charles Bronson at their best. In a way, this movie has inspired so many others after it...even Sam Raimi's 'Quick and the Dead,' another guilty pleasure of mine. Make sure you get the widescreen version of this, otherwise you're missing half the movie."

FAVORITE LINE:

MORTON: "Tell me, was it necessary that you kill all of them? I only told you to scare them."

FRANK: "People scare better when they're dying."

THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES (1976)

"Clint again directing, but this time taking his 'Man with No Name' character and giving him some depth and texture. This story about a Civil War vet whose past comes looking for him blew my mind when I was 15 years old, and to this day, I still have a copy of the Bob Peak poster in my possession."

FAVORITE LINE:

JOSEY WALES: "Now remember, things look bad and it looks like you're not gonna make it, then you gotta get mean. I mean plumb, mad-dog mean. 'Cause if you lose your head and you give up then you neither live nor win."

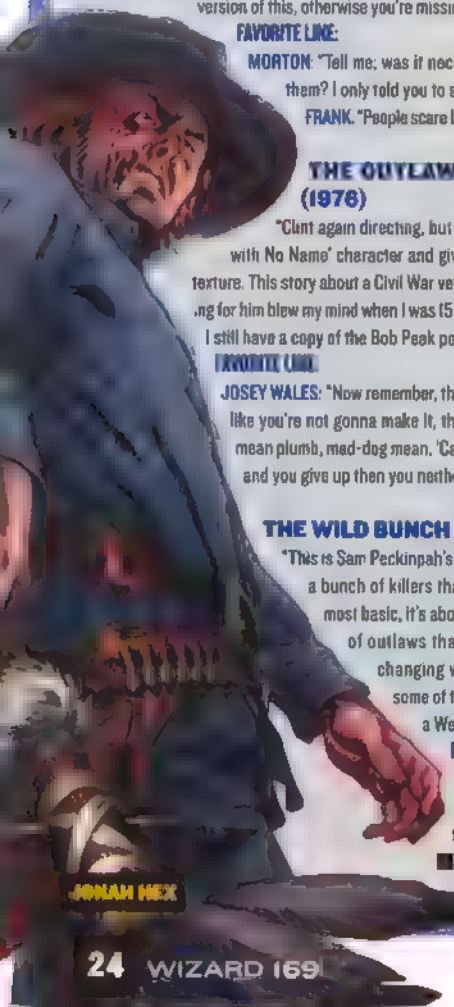
THE WILD BUNCH (1969)

"This is Sam Peckinpah's violently told story about a bunch of killers that head to Mexico. At its most basic, it's about an old-fashioned gang of outlaws that have to deal with the changing world around them. Still some of the most violent scenes in a Western I have ever seen."

FAVORITE LINE:

DEKE THORNTON: "What I like and what I need are two different things."

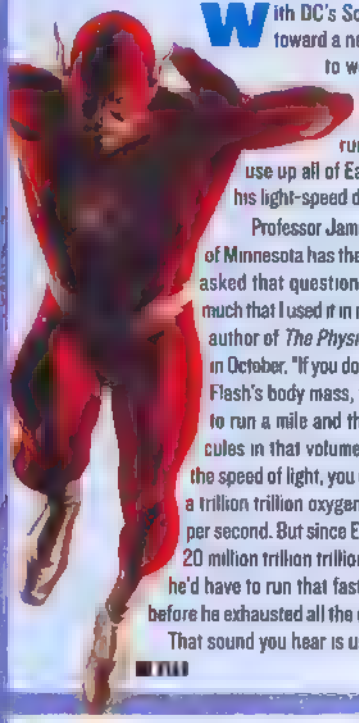
■ DYLAN BRUCE



JONAH HEX

CAN IT BE DONE?

THE FLASH'S BREATHING RATE



With DC's Scarlet Speedster sprinting toward a new era in his career, we got to wondering—since all living things process oxygen to perform physical acts like running, wouldn't the Flash use up all of Earth's oxygen during one of his light-speed dashes?

Professor James Kakalios of the University of Minnesota has the answer. "A student of mine asked that question in class, and I loved it so much that I used it in my new book," said Kakalios, author of *The Physics of Superheroes*, due out in October. "If you do some calculations using the Flash's body mass, the volume of oxygen used to run a mile and the number of oxygen molecules in that volume, and assuming he runs at the speed of light, you come up with a number like a trillion trillion oxygen molecules that he inhales per second. But since Earth's atmosphere contains 20 million trillion trillion trillion oxygen molecules, he'd have to run that fast for about 27 million years before he exhausted all the oxygen in the atmosphere."

That sound you hear is us breathing a sigh of relief.

■ TIM

'FRESHMEN' MEMORIES

STERBAKOV (THEN)

STERBAKOV (NOW)

Hugh Sterbakov co-created and writes—along with actor Seth Green—Top Cow's tale of unusual activity for a group of incoming college students in the new monthly title *The Freshmen*. But what was college life like for him? *Wizard* checked in with Sterbakov—and even dug up an old-school freshman photo, because we knew it'd embarrass his ass. Buy issue #2 now to help his confidence.

"I left my hometown of Philly for the first time and went to Ithaca College in upstate New York. I was terrified and overwhelmed. And the weather sucked. One of my roommates pledged a frat and had to wear peanut butter in his armpits and not shower for a week. And my other roommate, who was a football player, attacked me out of nowhere, because the school didn't tell me he had rage issues and was on parole. It was awful."

■ MC

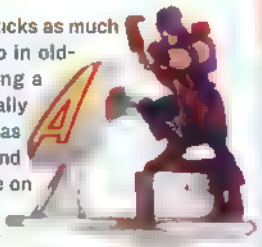
THE HEAT INDEX

Spidey and Kitty's crush, a Flash rogues rush and 5 other hits to make you blush

FLASH: ROGUE WAR (DC)

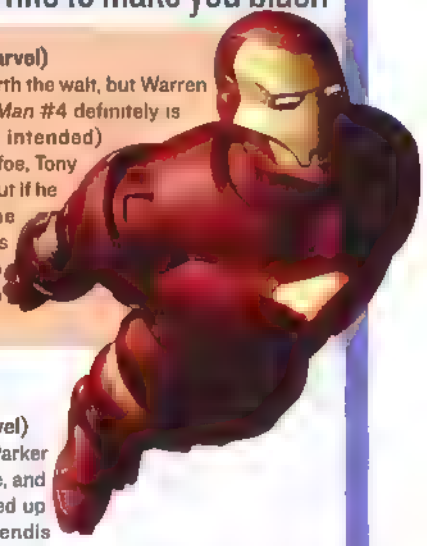
Apparently, when he decided he was leaving *Flash*, Geoff Johns decided to cram five more years' worth of awesome into five issues. From Wally trying to deal with all of his rogues to a cameo by the original Captain Boomerang to the return of Barry friggin' Allen, this story has more kickin' twists and curves than a *Playboy* centerfold!

HAWKEYE HEROCLIX (WizKids)



Finally, a Hawkeye figure that kicks as much ass as the fallen hero used to in old-school Avengers tales. Riding a Sky-Cycle that gives the usually land-based figure flight, as well as a range of 10 with running shot and hitting for five clicks of damage on his first click (and if you don't know what that means, give HeroClix a try—it'll hook you like crystal meth), this figure reminds us of everything we love about Earth's mightiest marksman.

IRON MAN #4 (Marvel)



Not all delayed books are worth the wait, but Warren Ellis and Adi Granov's *Iron Man* #4 definitely is. After getting his can (pun intended) handed to him by his newest foe, Tony is left battered and broken. But if he goes through with what he intends to do at the end of this issue, expect an Iron Man to emerge the likes of which we've never seen.

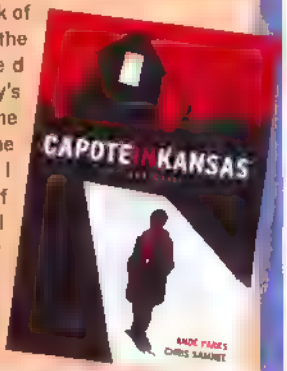
ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #1 (Marvel)

Love is in the air for Peter Parker and the X-Men's Kitty Pryde, and we couldn't be more choked up about it. Brian Michael Bendis pens a tale that tugs at the heartstrings of even the most obdurate fanboy. From Peter Parker's nervousness about his first date with Kitty to Kitty's crush on Peter, the story reminds us of our first high school love.

ARKHAM ASYLUM T-SHIRT (Graphitti Designs)

Major kudos to Graphitti for tailoring T-shirt props such as its Arkham Asylum inmate tee. You can totally picture the Joker or Two-Face wearing this government-issued clothing—but don't wear it just as an excuse to go psycho and kill babies. Just wear it 'cuz it's cool.

CAPOTE IN KANSAS (Oni)



In 1960, Truman Capote traveled to Kansas to research literature's first-ever true-crime novel *In Cold Blood*. This graphic novel by Ande Parks and Chris Samnee offers insight into Capote's task of interviewing the murdered Clutter family's friends and the killers, and the personal struggle of trying to tell the bloody tale without exploiting the small town's grief.

TOP TEN: THE FORTY-NINERS (DC/WildStorm)

Alan Moore and Gene Ha look back at the birth of the superhero city Neopolis, with gorgeous art and rich, moving characters—superpowered vigilantes, World War II heroes, robots, immigrant vampire mobsters and Nazi mad scientists comprise the melting pot of the future.

KEVIN SMITH

After finishing up 'Spider-Man/Black Cat,' the director targets 'Clerks 2,' debunks 'Star Wars' rumors and explains why he balked at Moon Knight

WIZARD: First things first: *Spider-Man/Black Cat* is finally in the can!

SMITH: I'm done! How happy am I to report that? For years I've been *pretending* I was done, but now, I can finally sit back and relax. But of course, immediately some motherf---er asks me, "Where's *Daredevil: Target?*" F---ing comics people, man. You can't please them!

What made you finally get off your ass and finish it off?

Marvel was moving on. They're at a point where they want to do a Black Cat ongoing series, because I guess there are rumors [Marvel Studios] might use Black Cat in "Spider-Man 3." Totally understandable. I had turned in the scripts for issues #4 and #5 about five months ago, so [Marvel Editor-In-Chief] Joe [Quesada] gave me a drop-dead date for the last issue, and I missed it. He gave me another one, and I missed it. And then he gave me one more, and I missed that. [*Laughs*] So he sent me one of those patented Joe Quesada guilt-inducing e-mails, where it's like, "You let me down, man, I thought we were friends." So rather than deal with the guilt, I e-mailed [editor] Axel Alonso and told him I wanted to finish the book, but Joe wouldn't let [artist] Terry [Dodson] start drawing until I turned in issue #6. The way I work is, I get more pumped about writing if I'm seeing pages. So I promised that if they started sending me jpegs of some of the pages, it would get me pumped to finish it. So we picked a date ..and I missed the date. [*Laughs*] But only by a week! And when I handed it in, we were all ecstatic. I was very happy, because those three issues that are coming aren't like anything else I've ever read in comics. They're very bizarre and moving and poignant, and they deal with an issue that's never really touched on in comics.

Now I gotta be the annoying fanboy and ask: What's up with *Daredevil: Target?*

That's next. The comic book fanbase is merciless, and in this instance, they're right. I can't even be like, "Oh, these overanxious fanboys." I mean, that book is *four* years late! A lot of people think it's kind of pointless now, because [Brian Michael] Bendis handled the whole Bullseye thing. But because I wrote the second issue almost a year after the first issue, I just dovetailed off the stuff in Bendis' *Daredevil*, so the story now kind of takes place after those events.

Beyond that, any other comics work lined up?

No. A few months ago, Joe said, "You should seriously think about doing this Moon Knight revamp." But I just didn't have a take on it. I was also like, "Dude, when are you guys going to learn? It took me three years to write three comic books of a miniseries that I started a long time ago! I'm just not the dude you wanna go to for a revamp or anything like that." It was kind of tempting, because you can turn Moon Knight into the Batman of Marvel to some degree. But I let that one go.

> **"There really isn't any truth to the rumors. I've never even met George Lucas."**
>
> —KEVIN SMITH, ON HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH A 'STAR WARS' TV SERIES

You've got plenty of Hollywood stuff to keep you busy, though...

Yeah, we started shooting "Passion of the Clerks" on September 19, though I would hesitate to call it Hollywood. [*Laughs*] I imagine we're aiming for an early 2006 release.

We haven't heard much about the plot.

That's because I haven't said anything about it. [*Laughs*] Yeah, I'm gonna try to keep it quiet. The beauty of the first movie was that nobody was expecting it, so everything was a total surprise. We won't have that working for us this time around. There's a degree of expectation built in, so I want to keep those expectations incredibly low.

Now what about all those rumors about a Star Wars TV show you're supposedly involved in?

I've read those! But there really isn't any truth to them. I've never even met George Lucas. But it's a very flattering rumor. What was weird was that it took on this insane life of its own, until finally there were reports that it's been confirmed from within Lucasfilm, and I'm like, "No way! It's not true at all!" But the show is so far down the road, so who knows? I think it would be tough to do. You're talking about a guy who lords over his creations. I probably couldn't do an all-Boba Fett episode, with Boba Fett doing all the sh-- I'd want him to do. I don't know how much creative freedom one would have.

What about all those "Daredevil 2" rumors swirling around, that Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner actually want to reprise their roles?

Not true at all! I know Ben doesn't want to do it, and Jen doesn't want to play Elektra again. And I think Ben would be leery of ever working with a girlfriend/wife ever again... [*Laughs*] ■ **RICHARD HO**

SNOOGANS! Jason Mewes and Kevin Smith will reprise their roles as Jay and Silent Bob in "Clerks 2: The Passion of the Clerks."

CHRISTMAS CAT With Kevin Smith finally finished writing the last three issues of *Spider-Man/Black Cat*, Marvel says issue #4 is on track for a December release.

CAPTAIN ATOM

DC's second-string hero gets a new look and could pose the greatest threat ever to the WildStorm Universe

He may not be the first guy Jonn Jonzz calls when there's danger, but this October, Captain Atom blows up in a big way in *Captain Atom: Armageddon*, a nine-issue mini-series from Will Pfeifer (*Catwoman*) and Giuseppe Camuncoli (*The Animatrix, Batman*) with covers by Jim Lee and Alex Ross!

"He's powerful, he's got a fairly long history with the DC Universe, but he's never really taken center stage," explains Pfeifer. "This was a chance to take someone who was always overshadowed by Superman or Batman and the well-known heroes, take him and put him into a whole different universe where he would really stand out."

The good Captain was last seen in *Superman/Batman* when he sacrificed himself to stop a Kryptonite asteroid shooting to Earth, but the absorption of so much energy shot Cap straight into the WildStorm Universe!

UP AND ATOM

Captain Nathaniel Adam of the United States Air Force was a Vietnam vet framed for murder and treason. To avoid execution, Adam joined the Captain Atom Project led by Col. Wade Eiling. Adam faced little hope of survival, as the experiment involved testing the hull of a crashed alien ship—by detonating a nuclear bomb under it, naturally. But Adam survived the blast when the ship's alloy bonded with his body, hurling him 18 years into the future and granting him strange superpowers.

A BREAK AT LAST

Fast-forward 18 years: Eiling, now a general, had married Adam's wife, adopted his children and tried to kill him! What's more, the conflicted would-be hero still working off his wrongful punishment, joined the Justice League as a government spy, further impairing his integrity.

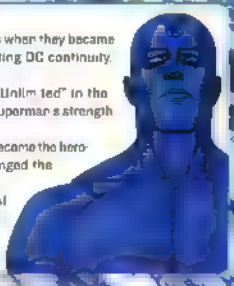
"That makes him a more interesting character," Pfeifer says. "He knows he's on the bottom of that list."

Captain Atom gets a clean slate after arriving in the WildStorm U., finally getting the chance to be the noblest of all.

"He stands out a little more because he has that DC Universe outlook where the superheroes serve humanity," says Pfeifer.

FIVE COOL CAPTAIN ATOM FACTS

1. One word: *Watchmen*. Alan Moore wanted to use the Charlton characters when they became DC property, but the heroes had to be recast so as not to affect existing DC continuity. Captain Atom's role then became Dr. Manhattan. >>
2. An animated Captain Atom battles Superman on "Justice League Unlimited" in the episode "Question Authority," channeling red sun radiation to reduce Superman's strength so the two could duke it out on a more even playing field.
3. In DC's 1991 *Armageddon 2001* crossover, Captain Atom was intended to become the hero-turned-villain Monarch, but when loose lips leaked the plot, DC changed the ending and instead marooned Cap in time.
4. He's currently married to Plastique, a former villain and ex-member of the Suicide Squad.
5. Captain Atom destroyed the Midwest in *Kingdom Come* when Parasite tore him open, reminding us that, deep down, he's just an atom bomb.



THE CLOTHES DON'T MAKE THE MAN

Similar to Alex Ross' *Kingdom Come* design, the Captain's new look marries the alloy/skin graft and the original costume designed by Spider-Man co-creator Steve Ditko, who had a talented hand in designing Captain Atom for Charlton Comics in 1960.

But outside of looking so cool, there's a reason for the change.

"Things are different now," says Pfeifer. "It's the Captain Atom you're used to, but he's in a whole new surrounding so things are changing both within him and outside of him."

UP NEXT...ARMAGEDDON

Captain Atom finds himself transported to another Earth, much like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz—but Cap can't just tap his ruby slippers to get back.

"When he goes in, something happens to him," explains Pfeifer. "A piece of the WildStorm Universe embeds itself in him and begins a very slow chain reaction that eventually will literally threaten everything."

Pfeifer promises the WSU's own heroes, including Majestic and the WildCats, will give Captain Atom a piece of their minds—and the stakes are very high.

"He becomes the ultimate atom bomb," Pfeifer says. "He has to figure out a way to defuse himself or get out of there before something happens."

And what might that something be? Will Captain Atom be okay?

"We'll get him home somehow," said Pfeifer hopefully. "When he comes back to the DCU, he's going to have a different attitude about everything and maybe he's not going to care so much about being a second fiddle to Superman."

BY KAROLENA BIELECKI

TOM WELLING

The 'Smallville' superstar gets lost in 'The Fog,' offers his thoughts on Brainiac and takes a shot behind the camera

WIZARD: You're starring in a remake of John Carpenter's 1980 horror classic, "The Fog" [Oct. 14]. What did you think of the original?

WELLING: It was a great film for the time period and raised the bar for the genre. On the set, John [Carpenter, who serves as a producer on this film] told me he really admired "Saw" because of what they accomplished with a small budget and that's exactly what he did with the original "Fog." But even though the original inspired this remake, there are quite a few differences. The fog is still there, but the reasoning behind it is different.

What's the relationship between your character and those played by your costars, Maggie Grace ["Lost"] and Selma Blair ["Hellboy"]?

A love triangle forms between my character, Nick, Elisabeth [Grace] and Stevie [Blair]. When the movie opens, Nick is in a relationship with Stevie, but Elisabeth—who he had a long relationship with before she left town—returns. You'll be wondering whom he's better off with.

"Smallville" begins its fifth season Sept. 29. How will Clark Kent change this season?

In past seasons, Clark fought his destiny, but this season he'll come upon information that will humble him and will make him accept that destiny. I think it's the constant struggle that keeps the character interesting and makes him interesting for me to play. But we will see more of an evolution toward the character we know Clark will become. We will see that even more with Lex [Michael Rosenbaum] moving toward the Lex Luthor we all know and love to hate.

Are we going to see the Fortress of Solitude?

Oh yeah, you see it in the first episode and it looks really good. It's based on the one from the [Christopher Reeve] film, so a lot of people will recognize it.

How do you feel about James Marsters, who played Spike on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," joining the show as Brainiac?

> **"I still have my fingers crossed for a young Bruce Wayne to make an appearance."**
>
> —TOM WELLING, ON CAMEOS IN "SMALLVILLE"

From what I understand, Brainiac is the ultimate villain. There is some interesting interaction between him and Lex in the beginning. In his alter ego as Professor Fine, he becomes a mentor to Clark, so that will be an interesting relationship. By the third or fourth episode, you'll find out that the character is not who he appears to be, and it was a big surprise for me reading the script. I'm looking forward to working with James. He's excited to be on the show and we're excited to have him.

Aquaman will also be appearing this season...

The most interesting thing for me is that his love interest, Erica [Durance, who plays Lois Lane], is terrified of water in real life. It's pretty ironic that her character falls in love with a guy who can't survive out of water. [*Laughs*] There are a few sequences that are going to involve Aquaman and Lois being completely underwater and that should make for an interesting few days of shooting. I'm looking forward to it! [*Laughs*]

What are your thoughts about characters lifted from the comics making appearances on the show?

I enjoy it. I like getting a glimpse of these characters before they become who we know them to be. I still have my fingers crossed for a young Bruce Wayne. I pester them about it all the time.

You're also making your directorial debut this season.

It's supposed to be episode 19, but I'm sure that will be moved around. I wanted to direct in season one, but I wanted to wait for them to ask me, and I'm glad they waited because I wasn't ready then. I think now I have a sense of what's necessary. I can't wait.

Do you see "Smallville" coming to an end anytime soon?

I would like to see the show continue as long as we maintain the integrity of what we set out to do, and that is to show Clark Kent before he becomes Superman, learning about where he's from and these abilities he has. Once things become easy for Clark, that's when we're done.

Are you looking forward to "Superman Returns"?

I'm excited. I want to see it as much as everybody else. The creators of our show [Al Gough and Miles Millar] visited the set in Australia and seemed very happy. If those guys are happy, I'm happy. ■ **BEN MORSE**

CAR OF SAND AND FOG Maggie Grace, Cole Heppell and Tom Welling haven't the foggiest idea why the car always stalls at the worst possible moment.

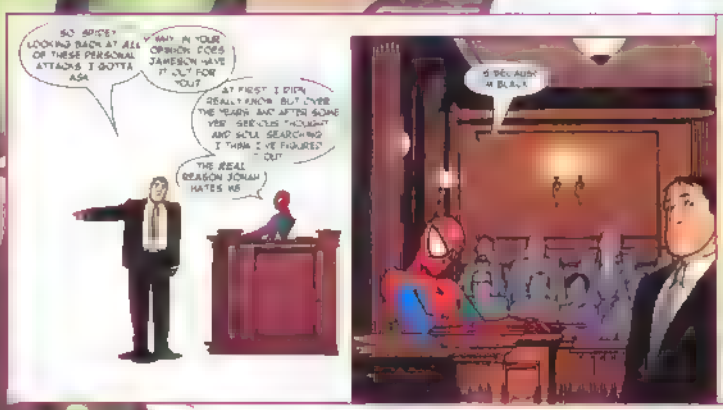
FIELD OF SCREAMS In "The Fog," 28-year-old "Smallville" actor Tom Welling stars as Nick, a resident of a seaside town who must face a horror brought on by his ancestors.

Green Dreams

Check out how Dan Slott's 'She-Hulk' has muscled into our hearts and why October's 'Vol. 2' will color our world

By Michael C. Sherrin

There are few certainties that people dread more than jury duty. Lucky for both the denizens of the Marvel Universe and fans like us, there's the evergreen chance that Jennifer Walters, the sensational She-Hulk, might be on the case. It's been eight months since we last saw the Jade Giantess, but thanks to writer Dan Slott and artist Juan Bobillo, *She-Hulk* returns with a new #1 in October. Over the last 12 issues, Slott & Co. have worked furiously to deftly meld Avengers-caliber heroics with the law-office quirkiness of "Ally McBeal" in order to create one of the most entertaining comics around. "With superhuman law, you just need to know the absurdities of the Marvel Universe," says Slott. "That's the way it works in She-Hulk's world; you're allowed to argue cases with comics. So all the stuff that everyone does on the message boards, you have all your legal training [right there]." In anticipation of the new #1, here are some highlights from last year's run.

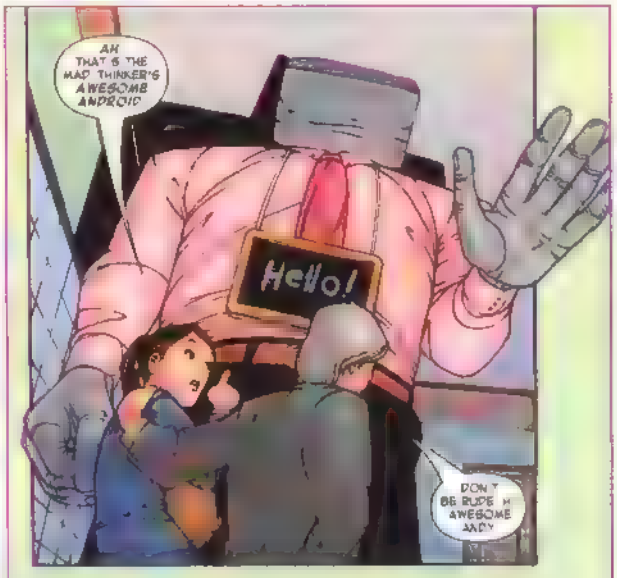


The courtroom may be a place for justice and order, but things can get wacky when superhuman law is concerned. The wisecracking web-slinger guest-stars to sue his oldest nemesis, *Daily Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson for libel (a claim that Jonah published articles with the express intent of injuring Spidey's reputation). Eager to make his Spider-Man extra witty, Slott bounced jokes off his most trusted barometer.

"I knew this was funny when my dad said, 'That's not funny,'" says Slott. "I went, 'Oh, that's gold.'" Shulkie's future legal battles include a superhero sexual assault case, the debate over teaching classes on evolution and superpowers in Marvel U. schools and challenging the legality of Marvel continuity itself.

While many heroes are measured by the villains they fight, that would just be selling poor She-Hulk short. While Shulkie may lack a star-studded rogues gallery, Slott never hesitates to throw in an assortment of unexpected villains from M.O.D.O.K. to the Constrictor to She-Hulk's greatest foe, Titania.

"I just have this bizarre affection for [these characters]," reveals Slott. While Blizzard expects a thorough beating, She-Hulk instead offers him a drink. Fans can expect some more Blizzard in the coming months. "There might be a legal problem that he needs She-Hulk's help for," hints the writer.



Better break out your *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*, cause Slott has a penchant for the obscure. Whether it's office assistants or guest stars, She-Hulk's supporting cast mixes Marvel A-Listers with has-beens and never-weres. Take Awesome Andy, for example. Once an enemy of the Fantastic Four, the Awesome Android has now changed his name and relinquished his villainous ways to become a clerk at She-Hulk's law firm. "He's such a good boy," coos Slott. "Everybody loves Awesome Andy. That should be a sitcom."

While no deals are yet in place, Slott teases future events. "There might be love in the air for Awesome Andy." Look for cameos aplenty in volume 2, including the "return" of Hawkeye in issue #21 (Don't worry—it's definitely Clint Barton!)

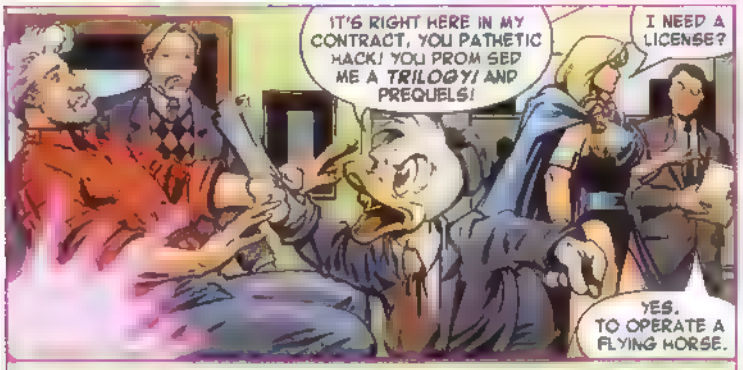
Some days you wake up and everything looks green. Unfortunately, green rarely looks this good. "She's very curvy, ain't [illegible]."

[illegible] die every issue of the first series, he brings his ultra-sexy She-Hulk and adorable Jen Walters back for volume 2.

"Juan brings this whole world with him where you get these wonderful actors that act their parts," Slott says. "You get these characters that we care about. At the same time, isn't his Jen Walters the sweetest, cutest person on the planet?"

Lauded for its innovation and clever scenarios—from making Comics Code-approved back issues admissible in court to shrinking dangerous supervillains—Slott has turned classic comic concepts on their head.

Thanks to Ant-Man's Pym particles, the U.S. government has begun shrinking captured supervillains, thereby making them easier to hold. While busting the Mad Thinker, Tiger Shark, the Wrecking Crew and more in a regular prison may be tough, it's much simpler when they're action figure-sized. "I've wanted to do [this] for years," says Slott.



"Mike Mayhew did these gorgeous covers for us that had all these characters in them that weren't in any stories and fans complained," remembers Slott. "Howard the Duck was on the cover to #8. So, we threw in that scene in #9 and I'm like, 'So why does Howard the Duck need a lawyer?' Well, obviously to sue George Lucas [who produced the universally panned "Howard" flick]. Nowadays, that would probably be Elektra arguing with Jennifer Garner."

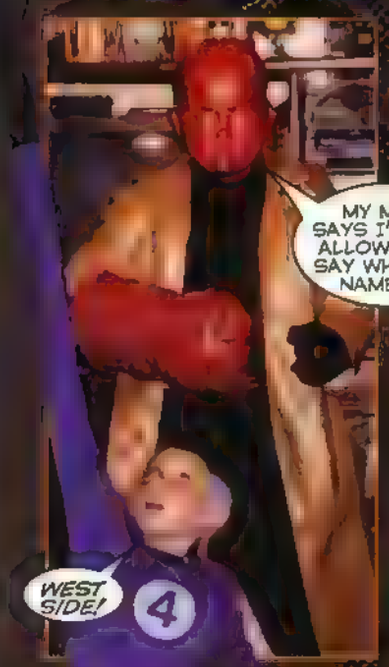
Slott packs panels with enough humor, cameos and Easter Egg material to reward fans for years to come. Volume 2 introduces a new boss who changes policy allowing the firm to defend supervillains. Slott promises that the firm will receive another surprise member. "A classic Marvel character is coming to *She-Hulk*. Will it be as a lawyer? Will it be as something else? Why will they be joining the law firm? [It's] someone that will make classic Avengers fans happy."

From giant android clerks to miniaturized villains, *She-Hulk* uses the Marvel Universe like a four-color playground. "In a time when some books have their own little worlds, *She-Hulk* revels in Marvel continuity, Marvel history and Marvel characters," Slott says. "The most important supporting cast member in *She-Hulk* is the Marvel Universe."

Alpha intern Michael C. Sherrin passed the bar. Then he changed his mind, went back and blew his money on 12 shots of Apple Pucker.

ALL DRESSED UP WITH NO PLACE TO GO

The Winners of the 14th Annual Halloween Costume Contest



HELLBOY
Casey Price
Marion, Va.

TUSKEN RAIDER
Kyle Wright
Weatherford, Okla.

CAPTAIN AMERICA
Will Surette
Woodbridge, Va.

THOR
Cappy Surette
Woodbridge, Va.

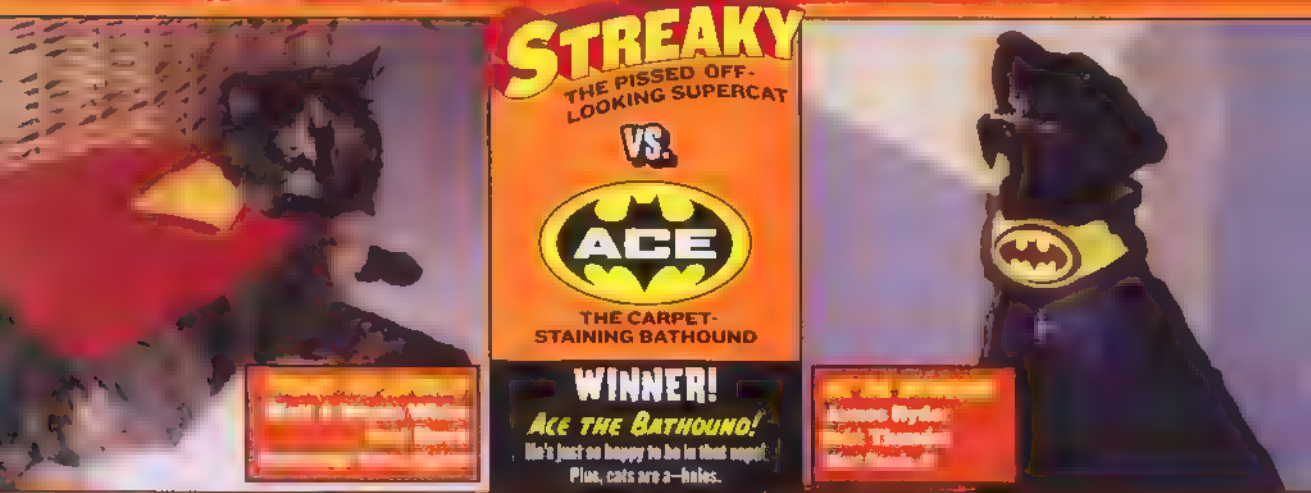
STAY-PUFT MARSHMALLOW MAN
Kirsten Granfield
Burbank, Calif.

THE THING, BATMAN, WONDER WOMAN, GREEN LANTERN & FLASH
James Bowden
Models: Batman: Bob Cruise
Wonder Woman: Alisa Hahn
Green Lantern: Marcus McDade
Thing and Flash: James Bowden
Houston, Texas

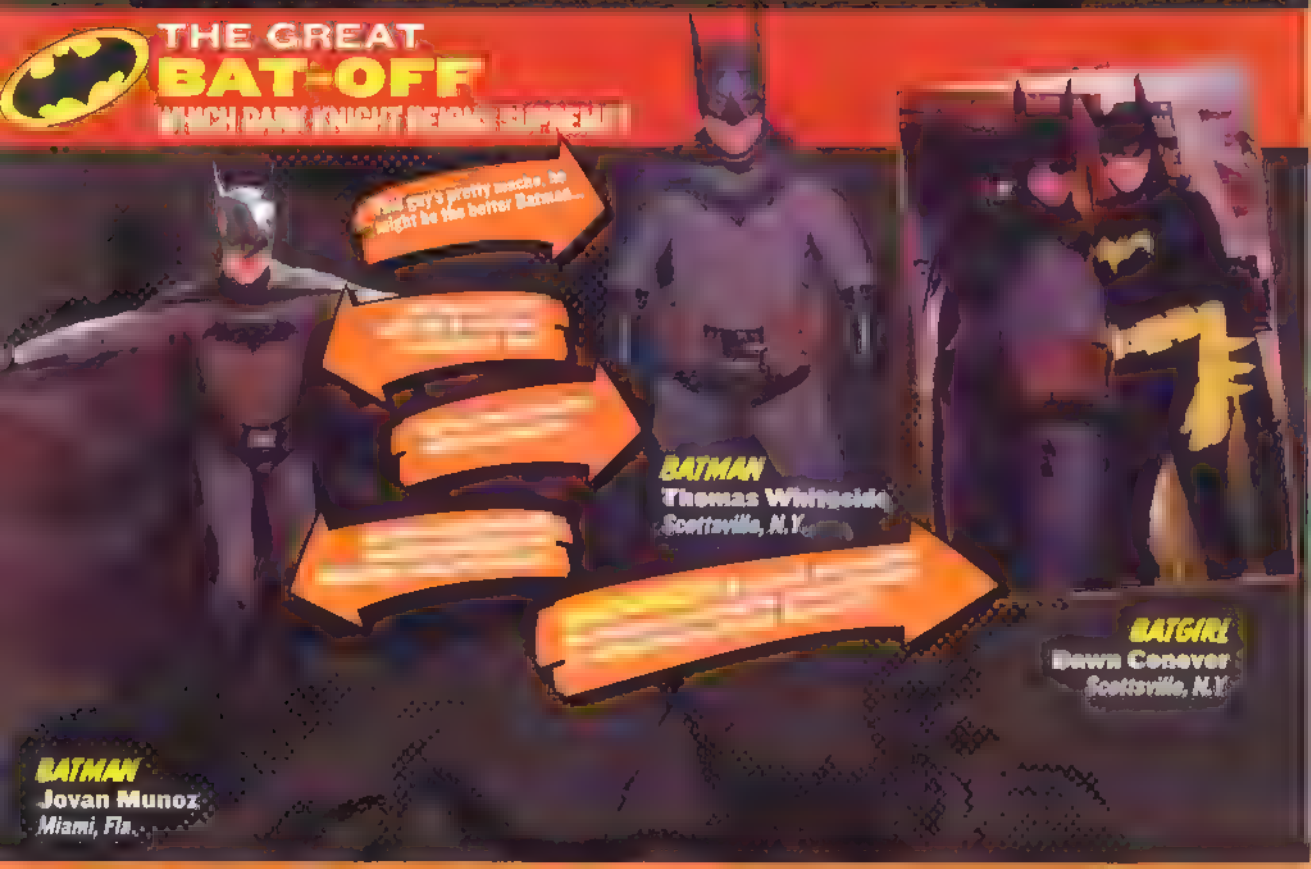
WOLVERINE, GAMBIT & CYCLOPS
Wolverine: Alex Vazquez Gambit: Lee Kumanchik
Cyclops: Stephen Reale
Gainesville, Fla.

MR. FANTASTIC
John Mathieu Beverage
Model: Ethan Lacappa
Hemet, Calif.

BATTLE OF THE SUPER-PETS!!



THE GREAT BAT-OFF



BATMAN
Thomas Whitesides
Scottsville, N.Y.

BATGIRL
Dawn Conover
Scottsville, N.Y.

BATMAN
Jovan Munoz
Miami, Fla.

GRAND-PRIZE WINNER!

THE MAXX

Beau Brown, *Dunwoody, Ga.*

When Beau Brown thinks "costume contest," what pops into his head? "Giant rabbit wearing purple and yellow."

"I like to make costumes that I haven't seen before," Brown, 25, explains of why he chose to design a costume based on Sam Kieth's monstrous, off-the-wall hero. "A lot of my favorite characters people have done. They've done them as good as they're going to be. So something like the Maxx, I felt, was a really great challenge of my skill just because he's so big."

A huge comic fan, Brown spent almost four months putting together this suit and estimates that it cost about $3,000. Created with the same materials that make up most sport mascot costumes, he used dense foam for the body wrapped in purple antron fleece—the same material most Muppets are made from! Though limited, he can walk and move his arms from inside the suit.

Brown has started work on his next costume, one much smaller but no less challenging. "I'm working on a Scarecrow costume from 'Hush,'" he says. "Getting rid of my nose was the biggest problem. He doesn't really have much of a nose." At least he won't have to contend with more giant teeth.

Thanks again to all of our participants! Didn't make it this year? Don't give up! Start on that ultra-detailed Devil Dinosaur costume for next year's contest now!

OUR HARVEY PAY

By Chris Ward

Harvey Pekar has crafted ordinary life into great stories, as seen in his autobiographical *American Splendor* comic book and award-winning film of the same title.

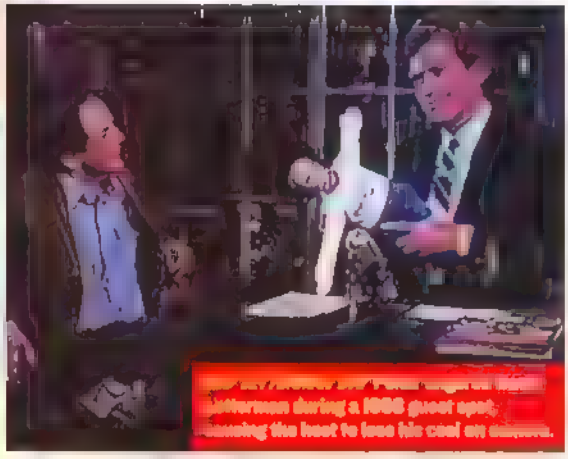
THE KING OF THE CLEVELAND CRANKS TAKES US ON A ONE-DAY, WHITE-KNUCKLE CRASH COURSE INTO THE INSPIRATION FOR HIS NEW GRAPHIC NOVEL—FROM THE GHETTO TO THE GRAVEYARD

As Harvey Pekar barrels the wrong way down a one-way, three-lane highway on a muggy Cleveland morning, I ditch my tape recorder and fumble for my seatbelt while riding shotgun in his patched-up 1993 Geo Prizm.

"Ordinary life is pretty complex stuff"—a famous adage coined by the celebrated *American Splendor* comic book writer beside me currently cursing at the road—instantly comes to mind as we begin our day together engaging in automobile antics most certainly frowned upon in Ohio. The surreal nature of the situation spins about and does donuts in my brain, and I'm hoping the Prizm won't do the same as bewildered and concerned motorists dart past us on both sides, point and rat-a-tat-tat their horns.

If this is an ordinary day for Harvey Pekar, then his life isn't as mundane as he preaches.

HARVEY PEKAR ON...



Moments ago, before beginning our accidental voyage into head-on traffic, Pekar (pronounced "PEE-kar," not "Pecker") and I chatted about Cleveland, about how the once booming "sixth city" of his birth, now pegged as the poorest major city in the nation by the U.S. Census Bureau, is doomed. "At one time it was densely populated, and now the city is hollowing out and there's no work here," he rasps in the same nasal, sour-grapes voice fans recognize from the award-winning "American Splendor" film based on his life. "The city of Cleveland doesn't have the resources to pull itself out of the mess it's in. It's just becoming a worse and worse place to live."

The city's decay is one subject the 66-year-old writer still waxes about with both bittersweet and passionate anger because, after all, it's still his home—wrong turns and all.

"This isn't just local pride that's making me say so, but this place is really F—ED. F—ed *bad*. Oh sh—...I'm in the wrong f—ing lane!" Pekar barks. "We're going to have to turn around somewhere—I don't know what the f--- I'm doing. There's a symphony of honks when I'm on the road," Pekar grins, adjusting his prescription glasses but leaving his seatbelt dangling against the door. "I don't mind you saying I'm a terrible driver, by the way, you can put that in your story. I don't know how many violations I committed today. I mean, driving the wrong way on a one-way street for about 10 blocks and sh-- like that. Runnin' that stop sign..."

I've only been cruising with Harvey 30 minutes, interviewing him about his brand-new DC/Vertigo graphic novel due in October, *The Quitter*—a meticulous and painful first-time look at the bulk of Pekar's upbringing and frequent fistfights—and I think my pesky questioning may have distracted him as we rattle down Kinsman Avenue toward his old neighborhood.

"No, no, you're fine ...I just can't do two things at once—that's probably why I got kicked out of the Navy. I just can't concentrate on a lot of stuff at once...especially mechanical stuff," he assures me. "You know, I'm very grateful for all the opportunities I get to push my book. I feel really good about it. I think it's possibly the best thing I've ever done."

Contrary to his cranky comic book persona, Pekar's in high spirits today. His eyes squint sharply as he grins and bug out intensely when he's sour. Pekar's slouched-over stroll is in sharp contrast to a series of early black and white photos seen for the first time in *The Quitter*—photos showing a young and stocky Pekar flexing bulging biceps, smiling wide and looking like Charles Atlas from 10-cent comic ads; he was ready to take on the world or, failing that, some wise-ass who ran his mouth. Now, his hair is thin and patchy, and his spidery, billowing eyebrows look like they're making a break for it when the car's dusty air conditioner blows cool air at his forehead.

And, like all kids today, Pekar's belt is askew while his banana-

LEFT: HEIDI MACDONALD/RIGHT: MICHAEL AVON OEMING/DAVE STEVENS/MARK WORLDWIDE, INC.

print Joe Boxers peek out the back of his crumpled black jeans in a half-wedgie. Since the '70s, he's been ahead of the curve when it comes to "rocking the grunge look," whether he's aware of it or not.

"I guess I'm close to my most amiable today. I've got this reputation as a curmudgeon, and the thing is I mainly don't meet people I don't know...but in Cleveland, I'm okay, you know," he says. "It just seems like whenever anybody writes about me, even if it's a real favorable review, they've always gotta say 'Cleveland curmudgeon Harvey Pekar.' And, I mean, I'm sick of it! I recently did a story for *Playboy Magazine* and they kept saying to me, 'We want to see more of the *real* Harvey,' you know. In other words, the neurotic, obsessive-compulsive character. I got kind of irritated because sometimes I can be grumpy, but I'm not the simple-minded caricature of myself."

As I'm listening, I'm also eyeballing the intersection ahead as Harvey zigzags back to the correct side of the road, nearly sideswiping a beat-up Dodge Charger.

"HERE'S OUR MAN"

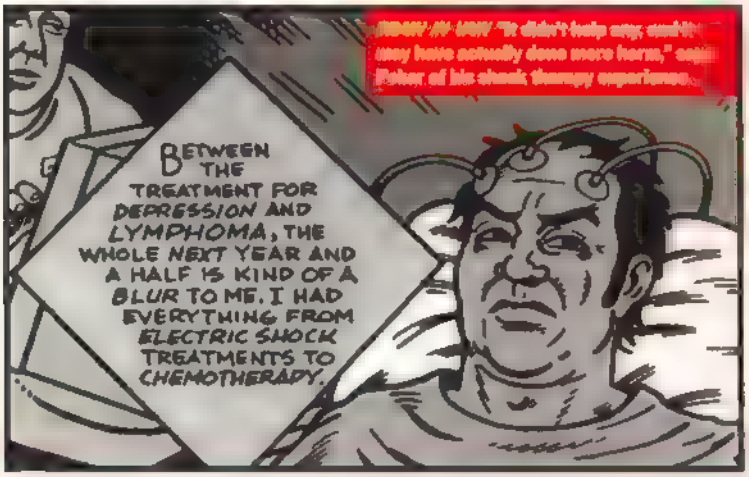
Today's tour of Cleveland, a journey to the old haunts and hang-outs Pekar revisits in *The Quitter*, marks an exception for the increasingly anti-social writer, who feels most comfortable at home these days with his wife (writer and activist Joyce Brabner) and daughter Danielle, at the typewriter, or in bed. This doesn't mean he's lazy. "I'm pretty motivated—driven, actually—as a writer to meet deadlines," he tells me, checking his mirrors. "That goes along with being a worrier. Worrying when I get up about what I have to finish. I'm obsessed with completing stuff. Getting finished with it and getting it out of my mind so it doesn't haunt me. I do that with just about everything in life, and then it's on to the next thing. Seems pointless, doesn't it? Running in place..."

What has haunted him is the process of recovering from a serious health shake-up in 2001, which he cites as heavily contributing to his unwillingness to go out anymore.

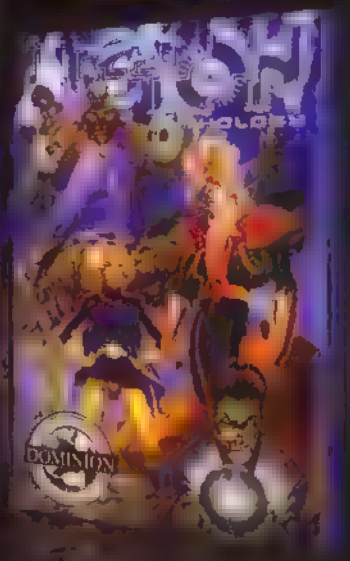
Following the filming of "American Splendor" and his retirement from a 35-year file clerk job at Cleveland's VA Hospital, Pekar had a serious emotional breakdown and went into a "state of complete collapse" that he would later write about in the comic *Our Movie Year*, nominated this year for a "Best Graphic Novel" Quill Award from *Publishers Weekly*.

In 2001, Pekar's non-Hodgkins lymphoma relapsed and he underwent extensive chemotherapy in addition to painful shock therapy for massive depression (I tell Harvey I didn't know shock therapy was still practiced. "I didn't either," he responds wide-eyed).

Also weighing on his mind is a noticeable drop in *American Splendor* interest now that the hubbub surrounding the film has come and gone, and that requests to speak on college campuses (a big moneymaker for Pekar) have dropped off to almost nothing. For an admitted homebody and social misfit, Pekar craves attention. "I could probably stand a lot more of it before I collapse," he jokes, and keeps his name in the phone book, should anyone want to call and rap with him. He explores these tics both for his reader's enjoyment and his own therapy in *The Quitter*, through recalling stories of constantly seeking approval from his parents and his penchant to quit unfulfilling jobs and activities before giving himself a chance to succeed. "I can identify with *The Quitter*, as I think a lot of people will, with the feeling of, 'If you can't be great at it, might as well not do it at all,'" says *Quitter* artist Dean Haspiel. "In his case, when he



SOON, THERE WILL BE A CLEAR DISTINCTION BEFORE AND...



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felt so compromised that he couldn't do anything about it, he would beat the sh— out of people. He thought with his fists when things weren't going his way."

Presently, however, Pekar's need for attention is motivated by the desire to support his family—which hasn't proven easy as an underground comic book writer living on a modest retirement pension. In the meantime, Pekar manages to pinch pennies whenever possible. I'm fully enjoying my *Wizard* expense account on this trip and offer to pick up his lunch tab. "You don't see me complainin'," he shoots back with a wry smile, admiring his own honesty.

BATTER UP

These days, Pekar's a little older and bonier than his comics portray him, and he takes a large dosage of pills to keep his mind chemically balanced, but otherwise our man's in good health—his cancer has crawled into remission and he still adheres to a strict vegetarian diet.

Considering the large number of fist-fights and brawls Pekar often provoked growing up in the rough Cleveland neighborhood we're currently driving through, you could say he's lucky to be alive at all. As illustrated by Haspiel in *The Quitter*, Harvey became obsessed with fighting at a young age—first to defend himself as the "only Jewish kid in an all-black neighborhood," and later to earn respect and instill fear—on the very streets we're navigating. He's no bruiser anymore, and hasn't thrown a punch since his 20s, but his old stomping grounds remain just as unforgiving.

"There's a lot of gang activity where we are now, actually. A lot of shootings," he tells me. I laugh nervously and slump in my seat as we drive slowly by dilapidated two-family houses, boarded-up delis and a pack of gangbangers dressed in white, heads cocked high, staring us down. Pekar pays them no mind and hunches over the wheel scratching a quarter-sized scar on his temple—the one he received after he collapsed on a radiator, as depicted in his American Book Award-winning *Our Cancer Year*.

"When I was a kid, there weren't shootings and stuff. That's all escalated," he says. "It used to be they'd just hit a guy with a baseball bat or something."

I remind Harvey that in his new book, *he's* the one hitting people with a baseball bat. A bad driver even at 18, *The Quitter* recounts when Pekar cut off a motorist from a "prominent Italian family" who wouldn't take "Sorry, pal" for an answer. After the man lunged at him with a baseball bat, Pekar snatched it away, hit him over the head several times and splintered the Louisville Slugger over his own knee.

"Yeah, I know I did that," he says. "But only after I was provoked."

Considering the number of drivers we've cut off today, I'm hoping we won't be provoking anyone in our current seedy locale—because I sincerely doubt the story would play out the same.

Sincerely.

MINDING THE STORE

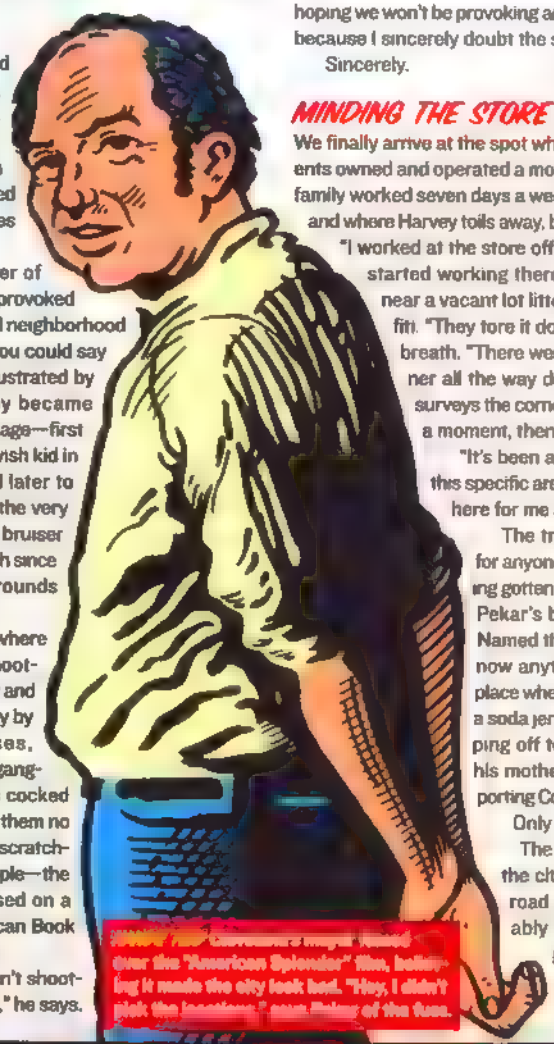
We finally arrive at the spot where Pekar's Polish immigrant parents owned and operated a mom 'n' pop grocery store, where the family worked seven days a week for 33 years to make ends meet and where Harvey toils away, bored and frustrated, in *The Quitter*. "I worked at the store off and on since I was 10 years old. I started working there..." Harvey pauses, as we brake near a vacant lot littered with busted bottles and graffiti. "They tore it down," he mutters quietly under his breath. "There were a group of stores from this corner all the way down to that next building." Pekar surveys the corner of 128th and Kinsman silently for a moment, then abruptly throws the car in gear.

"It's been a long time since I've been back to this specific area," he adds. "There's nothing down here for me anymore."

The truth is there's nothing down here for anyone, and I can't help but feel sad, having gotten to know the neighborhood through Pekar's body of autobiographical comics. Named the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood, it's now anything but. In *The Quitter*, it was a place where shops thrived, where Pekar KO'd a soda jerk in the middle of the street for lipping off to him, and where, to his chagrin, his mother made him hand out flyers supporting Communist candidate Henry Wallace.

Only ghosts remain.

The area's a shell of its 1950s self, but the city of Cleveland is hard at work on road construction regardless, presumably so drivers can speed out of this ghetto with minor inconvenience. Confused by the forest of road cones and swaying detour signs

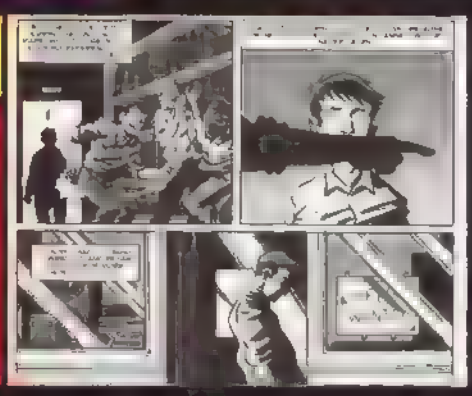


THE QUITTER

Harvey Pekar describes his latest graphic novel as "a parody of the 'American Splendor' movie."

Drawn by longtime collaborator Joseph Hasp[illegible], *The Quitter* is a work-level of Pekar's neurotic beginnings. "The hardest part about doing this book is to leave out a man's life," says Haspiel. "It's a really daunting task and I wanted to do it justice. I wanted Harvey to grace the project, and he basically dug what I was doing."

A proud Pekar even called *Wizard* to quote the early reviews. "Listen to this from Pulitzer Prize Winner John Patrick Shanley," he says. "'I love *The Quitter*! It's a house filled with unexpected rooms. A compelling passage from a man's soul!' I like that one. [illegible]"



before us, we make a bad judgment call—together this time—and drive the wrong way down yet another one-way street. This time, though, it's only one lane wide. Pekar pulls over to let cars by, eventually managing to inch sheepishly down the road, swearing at the dashboard.

> **"I CAN BE GRUMPY, BUT I'M NOT THE SIMPLE-MINDED CARICATURE OF MYSELF."** —HARVEY PEKAR

WE COULD BE ANTI-HEROES

Harvey and I exit the neighborhood via the considerably posher Shaker Heights. Though we're on the same road, Pekar tells me Kinsman Avenue changes its name once it hits the suburbs so as to not conjure up an association with the gritty neighborhood he once called home. Pulling over, we eventually get around to talking comics in the shade of a nearby picnic shelter house. It's too sweltering to be outside, but it beats running stop signs. It's no secret that Pekar, one of the godfathers of underground comics, isn't a fan of mainstream superhero books, seeing them as predictable, formulaic genre exercises in escapism where familiar archetypes can simply "pound the sh-- out of their problems." And he's still relatively unimpressed with the new school of capes and powerhouses.

"You know this guy Brad Meltzer?" he asks of the *Identity Crisis* writer and *New York Times* best-selling novelist.

"I was on a panel with him at the New York [BookExpo America], and we were having a good-natured disagreement about superhero stuff. I gave up on superhero stuff when I was, you know, in elementary school. He says, 'When's the last time you read a superhero book? They're doing much better stuff now than they used to.' So, I said, 'Okay. I'll admit that I don't keep regular tabs on superhero comics to see if they're going to improve or not. So what would you suggest I read?' So [DC] sent me some comics to read. He sent *Ex Machina*, and I read that. It was...*all right*."

The topic of graphic novels sends Pekar on an unexpected tangent about the recently deceased Will Eisner. "For what it's worth, Will Eisner did not do the first graphic novel—Robert Crumb was working on a graphic novel in 1962 called *The Big Yum Yum Book* he completed shortly thereafter and published in 1975, a few years before Eisner," he says, leaning in with intensity. "I never liked Eisner's more serious stuff. I just thought it was corny. He'd try to get all serious and it would just be pretentious and banal. I liked *The Spirit*, but it seemed like the harder he tried, the worse he got. He reminded me of a third-rate version of [American humorist] Ring Lardner, the way he wrote. With all this *Jewish stuff*. I mean, okay...I'm Jewish. And I had my belly full of that stuff when I was a kid—being obsessed with being a Jew and stuff like that. And I guess it works. Steven Spielberg couldn't get an Academy Award until he did, what, that 'Schindler's List' movie. You know, play the Jewish card and you'll get an award..."

Mid-conversation, Harvey's interrupted by a homeless man who's been eavesdropping for the last 10 minutes. "You need something, man?" Harvey asks, annoyed. He needs bus fare. A meal. He's got kids, you know. The gentleman chats with us in an awkward attempt to bridge the silence as we dig in our pockets for change. As it unfolds, I can practically imagine the odd banter playing out across Pekar's *American Splendor* panels. "Hey, are you guys talkin' about comics or sumpthin'? Wassat alla 'bout?" the man prods. "Hey," he

Please, sir, may I have some? Pekar proudly displays his tickets to the gum show in The Quitter's never-before-seen photo gallery.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVEY PEKAR

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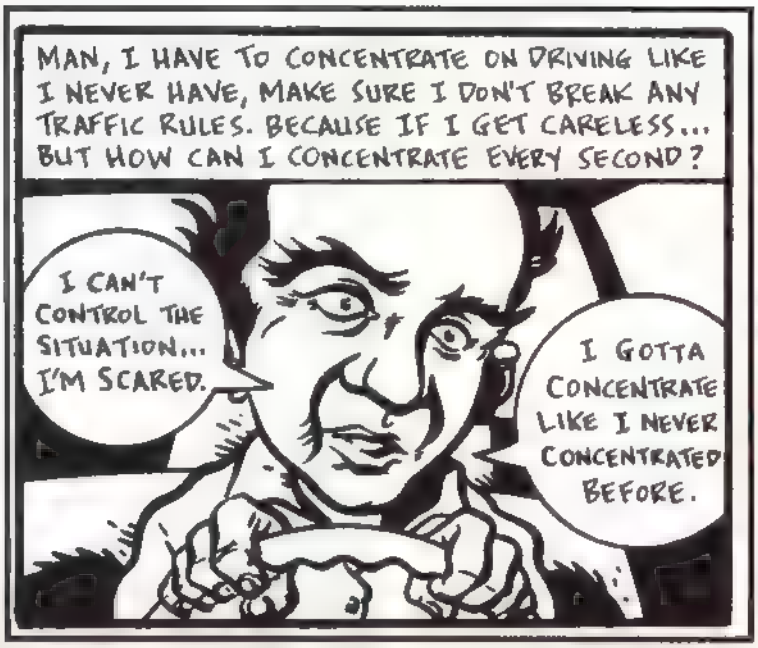

shouts at me. "Is this guy you're interviewin' a comic book character or sumpthin?"

Well...yeah. I guess you could say that.

GRAVE INSPIRATION

It's mid-afternoon, and Harvey decides to swing into Lake View Cemetery off Euclid Avenue, where we'll see both President Grover Cleveland's impressive gravesite and the setting for his wife's first *American Splendor* story appearance in 1984. From the balcony of the musty gray monument, downtown Cleveland peeks over the treetops and, from this distance, it looks wonderful. Feeling morbid, I ask what Pekar would like his tombstone to say. "I haven't particularly thought about that," he says. "When I'm dead, I'm assuming I won't be hovering around watching in the form of a ghost. Well, I haven't seen anything to make me think there's an afterlife...I mean, I'm not *dogmatic* about it or anything. There's so much we don't know—we certainly don't know a lot more than we know. Anything could turn out to be true. Anything's possible, I guess. I don't think about the afterlife much. It'd be nice if there was one, I guess."

In the same way, Pekar's never been big on cinematic endings dripping with meaning in his autobiographical strips. The appeal of *American Splendor*, and the lessons learned, come from the way Pekar documents and gives attention to the peculiar trivialities and cobwebbed corners of life. In his work, the desert is the sand and the forest is the trees; the minutia is just as important to the whole. And, then again, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

But in an era when any Joe Blow can blog his dreary afternoon for the world to read and where reality TV homes in on even the most insignificant of activities, U.S. culture seems to have come around to Pekar's way of thinking. Even today, the routine and the humdrum are a source of fascination with him, and not just the source of a steady paycheck. "I don't know anything else!" he explains. "If it's not mundane I haven't had any experience with it."

The Quitter stays the course, closing, he says, with a traditional Pekar ending: "Not with a bang, but with a whimper." His fears ultimately aren't put to rest, and there are no easy answers found in life's day-to-day struggles.

"The story I write with a closed ending is the one I write from beyond the grave," he tells me. "I always figured that, even though certain problems of mine are more extreme than other people's, there are all kinds of people around who are similarly afflicted. I get a lot of comfort from literature, reading about guys that are screwed up like I am. It makes me think, 'Oh, it's not so bad. There are other guys like me.' Back when I was planning to do all these comics and stuff and expand their scope, I noticed there's no realistic movement in comics like there is in just about every art form—they're either cartoony or people are idealized like superheroes. The work in comics is more realistic than it used to be, and I'd like to think that I had something to do with that."

...AND ALL THAT JAZZ

The sun sets on Lake View, and Pekar fires up his ride to take me back to my hotel.

And after going in circles for 10 minutes, we actually find our way out of the cemetery as I continue to admire the way Pekar puts a heavy burst of air behind the word "F—" on every utterance. The guy's really an accomplished curser.

At a downtown Cleveland Holiday Inn, I exit Mr. Pekar's wild ride unscathed and happy. Legendary drummer Buddy Rich knocks out thirds over the outdoor music speakers—a fitting soundtrack for rolling the credits on a day with one of Cleveland's consummate jazz critics and record collectors.

No offense to David Letterman (who famously butted heads with Pekar during his eighth and most-heated appearance on the show in 1988), but time spent with comicdom's foremost pessimist has proven to be very enjoyable.

He's cautiously optimistic about how his new book will be received ("I was happy that Joyce liked it," he says. "I was like, 'Jesus, if she liked it, everyone will.'"), but whatever the public's reaction, Pekar's engaging new hardcover proves you can teach an underdog new tricks. "The moral of the story is that he ultimately didn't quit," remarks Haspiel. "And he didn't quit his most important thing, which was to express himself. In a weird way, the oxymoron is that he's a winner. Look at the things he was able to get out of a mundane life."

Even today, Pekar hopes *The Quitter* will advance both his craft and help change the way comics are viewed as a whole.

"The main point of my effort in comics is to expand their use and to see them used as widely as novels and films are used—because they can be," he says. "I mean, I don't want to pick any quarrels with superhero fans because they can like what they want to like, but I don't think any genre should dominate a medium the way superhero comics have dominated the comic book medium. There's something unbalanced about that with all the other stuff there is to do. realism and surrealism and God knows what. Comics should aim for as broad a range as other art forms have, and I don't think that's recognized."

Before I leave, he sketches me a patented "Harvey Pekar stick figure"—the same elementary school artwork he first used to pitch Robert Crumb on illustrating his first *American Splendor* stories in 1972. "Come back and visit us sometime," reads the wobbly word balloon.

I think I will.

And next time, maybe I'll do the driving.

Staff Writer Chris Ward has never read The Rules of the Road, *but knows little old ladies are worth 50 points.*

X-MEN: DEADLY GENESIS

Fear conquers the Children of the Atom as Ed Brubaker and Trevor Hairsine unearth the most terrifying X-tale yet

BY RICHARD HO

For Charles Xavier's band of merry mutants, it's time to be afraid.

Very, very afraid

"Think of it as 'The Grudge' with the X-Men," explains writer Ed Brubaker of the horror he plans to unleash on the heroes in *X-Men: Deadly Genesis*, a six-issue event brought to life by *Ultimate Nightmare* artist Trevor Hairsine starting in November. "They come across a secret that Xavier's been keeping for all this time, and it turns into a horrible curse on them."

The embattled X-Men will have to face this curse while still reeling from the aftershocks of *House of M*, the eight-issue storyline that turns the entire Marvel Universe upside-down with its cataclysmic conclusion in October—and jump-starts the events of *Deadly Genesis*. "The new X-Men status quo after *House of M* is really cool," teases Brubaker, "and the story for *Deadly Genesis* starts about a week after the events of the final issue."

What is this dark secret buried deep in the X-Men's past, and why has it returned to haunt the X-Men of the present? Brubaker's not digging up all the answers just yet—but he *does* confirm it has something to do with a certain comic released 30 years ago.

"Marvel had the initial idea of doing something that ties in with the 30th anniversary of *Giant Size X-Men* #1," says Brubaker. "They wanted a story that looks back at that time period when the new X-Men were first getting together. So I started thinking about that. I've always liked those 'secrets buried in the past' kind of stories anyway—it's the kind of stuff I always write."

While story details remain hidden for now, Brubaker confirmed that the exploration of the X-Men's past would lead to the introduction of a new player on the mutant stage—one that just might eclipse a certain malevolent metal-shaper in pure evil.

"One of the jobs I set out for myself was to create a cool Magneto-level villain," reveals Brubaker. "This new villain is able to get into the X-Men's heads and exploit their greatest fears. There's a scene in which Nightcrawler is walking through the woods at night, and suddenly he's surrounded by the villagers who were chasing him back in *Giant Size X-Men* #1. He's gone through so much since then that you wouldn't think it would affect him—but for some reason, it really freaks him out."

The journey through X-history will be bittersweet, as classic X-Men like Nightcrawler, Colossus and Banshee come together once more. "All the 'new' X-Men are back together," says Brubaker. "The ones who are still alive gather in the mansion, brought together the same way they were back then. They all reflect back on the events of that first adventure, and we get to delve into when they all met Charles Xavier for the first time."

The nostalgia isn't lost on Brubaker himself, who finally gets a chance to apply his dark, psychological sensibilities to his childhood heroes. "I remember buying *Giant Size X-Men* #1 for a dollar in the back-issue bin as a kid," says Brubaker. "And now, I get to create a new X-Men villain, I get to do this story that takes place in a two-week window after *House of M*, and I get to take my pick of all the mutants that I love. I get to play in the sandbox and see how much fun it can be!"

The fun—and the screams—start in November. In the meantime, *Wizard*'s dug up an exclusive preview of *X-Men: Deadly Genesis* #1, including the first look at the X-Men's newest nemesis in action!

So read on...if you dare!

BIG BAD Whoever this guy is, Ed Brubaker promises he'll be on a par with Magneto when he comes to terrorize the X-Men.

ED BRUBAKER PENCILER TREVOR HAIRSINE KRIS JUSTICE COLORIST VAL STAPLES LETTERER DAVE LANPHEAR
NATE COSBY MARK PANICCIA

WHAT THE HELL'S GOIN' ON HERE?
YEAH.. I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST RANDOM OPENINGS IN THE ROCK FACE, BUT IT *LOOKS LIKE* THIS WINDS AROUND TO THE TOP.
CYCLOPS.. SOMETHING'S WRONG.
WHAT'S IT?
I CAN FEEL HER BUT....IT'S FAINT...
.. IT'S WRONG...
..LIKE SHE'S JUST OUT OF MY MIND'S REACH... BUT--
SCOTT?
JEAN?
AW GOD, NOT AGA'IN
HELP ME...
WAIT! JEAN COME BACK!
RACHEL, NO!

THAT AIN'T JEANIE.
I KNOW.
SNIKT
SO THEN.
I GUESS YOU TWO ARE THE BRIGHT ONES?
RACHEL!

AAARRRRGGG!
I WAS GOING TO BE GENTLE, YOU KNOW...
...LIKE I WAS WITH THE GIRL
I JUST SHUT OFF THE CURRENT N HER BRAIN FOR A FEW SECONDS.
BUT YOU ARE REALLY GETTING ON MY NERVES.
RRRRAAA!

YEAH, THAT'S NOT GOING TO CUT IT, EITHER...EVER WONDERED WHAT IT FELT LIKE, THOUGH?
AHH!
YOU STILL CONSCIOUS?
KILL YOU.
I DON'T THINK SO.
AAAAHHHH!

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT.
MARVEL GIRL?
NOT ANY MARVEL GIRL I'VE EVER HEARD OF.
LEAVE HER ALONE
AH, SCOTT, AT LEAST YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED.
HOW D'YOU KNOW MY... NAME...?
YOU DON'T REMEMBER ME?
WELL, THAT'S JUST...SO PERFECT...
LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT A USE FOR THE GIRL, AFTER ALL...
WHO IS THIS GUY? LEARN MORE IN X-MEN: DEADLY GENESIS #1 ON SALE NOVEMBER 16!

PETER DAVID: UNPLUGGED

As his 'Spider-Man: The Other' arc rocks the Web-slinger, the veteran writer reflects on his 20-year career, including his feud with Joe Quesada, how 'Star Trek' torpedoed him and why he *really* killed Hulk's wife

BY RICHARD LEE

FULL CIRCLE In October, Peter David returns to the first character he wrote professionally with *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man* #1.

"I DON'T KNOW WHEN TO SHUT UP," admits Peter David.

The veteran writer leans back in his favorite chair in his suburban New York home, reflecting on his undisputed reputation as one of the most outspoken creators in comics. "Anyone who knows me will tell you that saying what's on my mind—mouthing off about this, that and the other thing—is pretty much a natural state of being for me," he continues. "It takes a conscious effort to keep my mouth shut. [Author] Harlan Ellison once dubbed me the mouth that walks like a man."

Indeed, to say that the writer—who's maintained a weekly opinion column for over 10 years and has waged wars of words with industry heavyweights such as Rob Liefeld and John Byrne—enjoys speaking his mind would be a classic understatement. Throughout a long and prolific career, spanning acclaimed runs on titles such as *Incredible Hulk*, *Spectacular Spider-Man* and *Supergirl*, David has always clung to the First Amendment as if it were a lifeboat adrift in a sea of political correctness, never shying away from expressing his opinions on any number of hot-button topics—from the state of the comics industry to the political minefield of the war in Iraq.

But though he may occasionally digress, David never strays from what he believes to be the truth. "Not to go all Obi-Wan Kenobi, but different people are going to say what they believe to be the truth, and different people are going to say you're full of crap," says the writer. "That's not going to stop me from saying what's on my mind."

In that same spirit, *Wizard* convinced the outspoken scribe to point his mouth in his own direction and tell the story of his career in his own words. Nothing but the truth—but maybe with a few digressions.

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN
(Marvel, 1985-1988)

While David got his start at Marvel as the publisher's direct sales manager, Spectacular Spider-Man was his first foray into full-time writing for the House of Ideas. The most memorable moments from his brief two-year run were the resolution of the "Hobgoblin" storyline and the "The Death of Jean DeWolff," in which the writer introduced the character of the Sin-Eater.

[EDITOR] JIM OWSLEY wanted to kill off [NYC police captain] Jean DeWolff, and he wanted me to launch a storyline that would define *Spectacular Spider-Man* as gritty and intense—something in the tradition of "Hill Street Blues." The method by which Jean died, who did it and all that, he left entirely up to me [*Editor's note: DeWolff was shot and killed point-blank with a shotgun.*]

I got the concept for the Sin-Eater from a TV movie starring Lindsay Wagner in which she played a medicine woman. Basically, when somebody dies, fruits are laid on the person's body, representing the sins of the individual, and the sin-eater shows up and eats the fruits, taking that person's sins onto himself so the dead can go to Heaven. It's a fascinating concept, and I worked it into the story.

The other thing that sticks out in my mind was the resolution to the Hobgoblin storyline, which got me a certain degree of notoriety. We had a Spider-Man writers' meeting to work out who the Hobgoblin was going to be. It was decided that it would be Ned Leeds, and that [*Amazing Spider-Man* writer] Tom DeFalco would take point in building up to the reveal. Flash forward some months. Tom is no longer doing *Spider-Man*, and Owsley tells me that I'm going to do the reveal of Hobgoblin—and he's going to be the Foreigner. I say, "F--- that, he's not going to be the Foreigner!" But Owsley says he's killing off Ned Leeds in the *Spider-Man vs. Wolverine* one-shot, which was already drawn. So now I'm having a nervous breakdown, and he says, "Fine, it can't be Ned Leeds, but come up with somebody else." Tom did a magnificent job of pointing every single arrow at Ned Leeds, and it suddenly hits me: What if Ned Leeds was the Hobgoblin, but Jack O'Lantern, who had a grudge against him, wanted him dead and hired the Foreigner to have him killed, and then took over his identity? And since Ned Leeds was killed a few months before the reveal, not a single fan thought we would be dumb enough to have it be him. So when we did the reveal, people freaked out. At the time, I said, "No one has ever done anything like this before, and of course no one will ever be insane enough to do anything like this again."

ROGUE WAR Standouts from David's *Spectacular Spidey* run were the Sin-Eater (top right) and untangling the mess that was the Hobgoblin's secret identity.

INCREDIBLE HULK
(Marvel, 1987-1998)

While Al Milgrom was the first writer to bring back the gray version of the Hulk, David's seminal run on the series fleshed him out, giving him his cunning, intelligent personality. The 11-year run also trumpeted the development of sidekick Rick Jones, the emergence of the Mr. Fixit personality and the merged Hulk, as well as a dark final year that mirrored some difficult times in David's personal life.

BRUCE BANNER was restored to his gray incarnation mainly to distinguish him from Rick Jones, who was going to be the green Hulk. Al Milgrom was leaving the series and [Editor] Bob Harras gave me the option to either keep Bruce as the gray Hulk or have Rick be the Hulk from that point on. I stuck with Bruce as the gray

IDENTITY CRISIS David pitted the various Hulk incarnations, considered split personalities, against each other inside Banner's mind before combining them all into one "merged Hulk" personality.

Hulk because it struck me as something interesting that hadn't really been explored.

It always breaks me up when people say I went too far from the roots of the character, considering the very first thing I did was read the first six issues. In those days, the Hulk was changing personalities faster then the average person changes underwear. What I essentially did was graft the craftiness of the gray Hulk with the thuggishness of the green Hulk from issue #6 to develop an almost "criminal mastermind" attitude. He didn't have the strength potential of the savage green Hulk, so he had to make up for it somehow—and to me, it's more interesting to see somebody think their way out of a situation, rather then pound it into an unmoving lump.

Joe Fixit [the gray incarnation of the Hulk] came from the notion that Bruce Banner was always trying to set up an identity and a life for himself, and the Hulk would invariably come along and totally bugger it. But with Joe Fixit, the Hulk was finally in a situation where he had been able to set up a life, career and existence that he really liked, and all of a sudden Bruce Banner comes along to spoil it. In my mind, a lot of what drove Bruce Banner was his greatest nightmare—that he would eventually become like his father. That was one of the reasons that he did everything to suppress his emotions, because he saw what his father's uncontrollable emotions wound up doing—killing his mother, causing destruction and havoc. And I thought it would be interesting to do a storyline in which, for all intents and purposes, Bruce's nightmare comes true. When we see the merged Hulk—not the professor, thank you very much!—we are essentially seeing Bruce Banner and what he would have been like if his personality had not splintered. Absolutely arrogant, totally egotistical. When you're dealing with someone who's tall and green and is capable of pretty much destroying anything that is near him, when he acts like he's the baddest mofo on the planet, you're not going to get in his face. But the point is, he would have acted like that even if he had been 5'7" and 115 pounds. The attitude would have remained exactly the same. And that's the realization that he slowly comes to over a period of time, which is kind of horrifying to him.

The direction I decided to take Rick Jones in was that this is a guy who's been around for so long, and been a fixture in so many aspects of the Marvel Universe, that he's seen it all. And when you get down to it, he's a guy with no powers. That was why I didn't like the notion of him being able to transform into the Hulk. Rick should be the fans' go-to guy in the comic book. He should be the one who represents the everyfan, even more so than Peter Parker, because there's going to be times where readers see stuff in a comic book and go, "Do you believe this sh--?" And if Rick is in the story, he should be saying it before the readers. He's going to be the one who looks at a situation and goes, "No, we encountered something like this four years ago and I can't believe we're encountering it again."

My last year was unbelievably shaky. A lot of things had changed in my life. One of the major underpinnings of the book was the ongoing love story between the Hulk and Betty—to a very large degree, Betty was the representation of my wife and I was Bruce. And then my wife left me. The marriage fell apart, and a lot of the frustration and darkness that I was going through wound up spilling over into the book. In my last days, [Editor] Bobbie Chase came to me and said, "You always said you would never kill off Betty because you identify her with your wife. But now, the safety net under Betty is gone." And I said, "Are you suggesting that we kill off Betty?" She said yes, and I said, "Fine, she's toast." And that was it for Betty.

STAR TREK
(DC, 1988-1991)

David has carved out a niche in Star Trek fandom as one of the most prolific novelists in the revered franchise's long history. With over 30 Trek novels under his belt, David also has plenty of Trek comics on his résumé, including an eight-issue run on DC's first series and a 15-issue run that kicked off the publisher's second series.

I LOVED THE PURITY of the original concept. You've got Captain Kirk, who is essentially the everyman. You've got Spock

SILVER STREAK Why is Quicksilver always such an ass? David provided the answer.

representing pure logic and Dr. McCoy representing pure emotion. You've got the two of them always warring with each other about what to do over any given situation, and Kirk in the middle trying to balance emotion and logic and come to a decision. So on every level I just loved original "Trek," and when I got to play in that universe, it was just a tremendous opportunity and the fulfillment of a fantasy for me. I wound up getting to write the comic book for DC, which was edited by my friend Bob Greenberger.

Of course, it wasn't all fun and games. There was this guy at Paramount named Richard Arnold who had developed a singular hostility for my work on *Star Trek*. This probably stemmed from the fact that he once told me that he thought the ideal *Star Trek* comics were the ones that Dell produced [in the 1960s], and I kind of laughed in his face. People don't like it when I laugh in their faces—go figure! At any rate, Richard became increasingly hostile and restrictive to what I was doing, up to and including generating such bizarre notes as, when I wanted to give Captain Kirk a love interest, he said Captain Kirk is no longer interested in women. And I just sat there and went, "What?"

They were always on me about not having too much violence, so I did an issue in which the only violence that occurred was Captain Kirk in a fight off-panel. This story was rejected by Richard Arnold as having too much violence, and I flipped. How can something be declared too violent when I don't show the violence? I was utterly convinced at this point that scripts would come in, and Richard would reject them first and then figure out why he was going to reject them second. So I wrote a script for a fill-in issue involving a security guard and made sure to put in some really violent sequences that were specifically on-panel—and just to be sporting about it, I signed it as being written by Robert Bruce Banner, reasoning that Richard probably doesn't read *Hulk*. The script goes into Paramount and comes back from Richard, and the only change that they requested is a sound effect. Otherwise, the script was approved in its entirety! And that was the point where I threw up my hands and went to Bob Greenberger and said, "I have to quit the book, because Richard has set up a situation where I can't stay. All I'm going to do is impede DC's ability to produce the book." I took myself off the book because Bob was a friend and I felt that my continued presence was going to be a liability. Entirely due to Richard Arnold.

X-FACTOR
(Marvel, 1991-1993)

With the X-Universe riding an incredible wave of success in the late '80s/early '90s, David's fun-filled revamp of X-Factor *brought a new crew of mutants to the forefront and helped put Joe Quesada on the map*

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE good news/bad news deals. [Editor] Bob Harras approached me to take over *X-Factor*, and I went, "Hot damn! A chance to work with Cyclops, Marvel Girl..." And he said, "Here's the thing...none of those characters are going to be in the book." He explained to me that they were going to shake things up with all these other characters, at least two of which I barely had any knowledge of at all. "Who the f--- is Guido? Multiple Man? You're killing me here!" But it was an X-book, and Bob assured me that I would be able to take a far more humorous angle, so I said okay.

Joe would have been on the map eventually, even without *X-Factor*. He was that talented.

I had people coming up to me and telling me that they hated Quicksilver for 30 years until that one four-page sequence [in *X-Factor* #87] where I had him explain why he is the way he is, in such a way that he became accessible. So that's nice. I never got a thank you note from Quicksilver, though. What a pr---. [*Laughs*]

CAPTAIN MARVEL

(Marvel, 2000-2004)

David's innovative take on the Genis Vell/Rick Jones dynamic was so popular that not even the threat of cancellation — or Marvel's ensuing U-Decide promotion—could sink the title

[EDITOR] TOM BREVOORT asked me if I would be interested in coming on to write *Captain Marvel*, and I said no. Then he told me that he's combined with Rick Jones now, and I said, "What?" That's what drew me to the series.

I personally didn't think that it would last very long, so I really didn't care if people hated it. So I wrote this thing as if it were written by a demented fanboy, to be of tremendous amusement to the fans. It had always been my attention to shift gears suddenly with a very serious storyline in which Captain Marvel completely loses his mind.

And that was when Marvel suddenly decided that the book was in sales trouble, and that they would have to raise the price in order to keep it around. I went ballistic. I wrote an open letter to Marvel in my column, which set off the massive sh--storm that came to be known as U-Decide.

At first, there was genuine hostility from [Editor-in-Chief] Joe [Quesada] in regards to my letter. I like Joe a lot, so I was tremendously relieved when he eventually came around and decided to go with it in the spirit of, "Let's slug it out in public and have some real fun with it, rather than just be angry." For which I give him major props. He could have just as easily said, "F— you and the horse you rode in on," and that's it for me at Marvel. And he didn't. I wasn't ecstatic with the whole notion of U-Decide, because to me, the writer's job is to hide behind the characters as much as possible. But I was so happy that Joe was talking to me again that I went along with it.

SUPERGIRL/FALLEN ANGEL

(DC, 1996-2005)

David's 80-issue run on Supergirl *established the Linda Danvers/Matrix version of the heroine as the most fully developed incarnation to date*

I TRIED TO WRITE HER as something other then Superman with t--s. There hasn't been an ongoing Superman book that's dealt with anything vaguely mystical, and certainly nothing that dealt with matters of faith and God. It was completely uncharted territory, and that's where I went.

Is Lee [from *Fallen Angel*] actually Linda Danvers? Yes—but not really. I had a *Supergirl* storyline that I was going to do after "Many Happy Returns" [the last *Supergirl* arc] which was made academic when DC decided not to continue the series. But Dan [DiDio] really liked the concepts and said, "Why don't we do this story, but create completely original characters for it?" But I was deliberately coy with saying whether she was Linda Danvers, because I wanted to give people a reason to pick up the book. There are some who say I should have said right upfront, "She is not Linda Danvers." But I firmly believe that if I had, we would have been canceled by issue #6. [*Editor's note: The series lasted until issue #20; it's slated to return in 2006 with publisher IDW.*]

ROB LIEFELD

David's feud with the former X-Force penciler began as a defense of his friend and former Liefeld collaborator, New Mutants writer Louise Simonson

ROB WAS TRASH-TALKING

Louise because he wanted to set the record straight about who created Cable, saying that he was a stickler for credit. This put my nose out of joint for two reasons. First, Louise is one of the sweetest women in the industry, and second, Rob Liefeld is one of the most renowned swipe artists. So my attitude was, "I'm not going to let him get away with that," and I

DAVID DOES DALLAS

Peter David joins the lineup for Wizard World Texas

WIZARD WORLD TEXAS

Can't get enough of what Peter David has to say?

Well come meet him in person as a special guest at Wizard World Texas, May 6-8 at the Arlington Convention Center.

Hear him talk about his legendary runs on *Supergirl*, *Incredible Hulk* and *Aquaman*. Or take in his thoughts on his upcoming *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man* run.

Any way you slice it, the opportunity to meet the legendary comics writer is worth the price of admission alone. ($45 for a three-day pass, $25 for one day).

But that's not all.

Other special guests include Terry Moore (courtesy of ACTION), Michael Turner, Ethan Van Sciver and more!

Check out exhibitor booths from Aspen, Diamond Select Toys, Dream Works, FUNimation, Lions Gate, Sears, Upper Deck, Wizards of the Coast, WizKids and others.

See an exclusive clip from the upcoming "Ultimate Avengers" DVD from Lions Gate and Marvel Studios featuring special guest, *Ultimates* artist Bryan Hitch.

Game your day away at the Ultimate Video Game Challenge powered by GameStop, featuring today's hottest games on over 40 consoles.

Participate in a full schedule of gaming events and tournaments presented by Sears, Upper Deck, Wizards of the Coast and WizKids, including the WizKids Wizard World Invitationals where you can compete in local and regional events for a chance at the championship at Wizard World Texas. Grand Prize includes: Champion's choice of a one-of-a-kind masterpiece figure from one of the most recent expansions. Go to wizkidsgames.com for details, scheduling and locations.

For tickets and more information on Wizard World Texas, visit wizarduniverse.com.

lambasted him in my column.

There was this one other time when they were publicly showing pages of Rob's *Captain America*, and I was in hysterics. I was peeing myself because it was so awful, and there were no word balloons. So I thought, "We should add some words." Just for pure sh--s and giggles. I had the characters making comments like, "Wow, you're much taller than you were a second ago!" because Captain America was walking along and his head was the same level as a street lamp.

JOHN BYRNE

As two of the most vocal veterans in the comics industry, David and Byrne have rarely seen eye to eye—especially when it comes to editorial mandates and lawsuits

THIS WAS ALL because of leg hair

John Byrne stormed off *She-Hulk* citing editorial interference and naming [*She-Hulk* Editor] Bobbie Chase as the chief interferer, and the fans immediately began to excoriate Bobbie. I got pissed off because Bobbie was a dear friend, and to me, this was bullying—especially since I knew what the real reason was. So I simply said that everyone should get the full picture and understand exactly what the editorial mandate was that John found so offensive. And here's what it was: In a She-Hulk limited series, they had a throwaway gag where she's sitting in a bathtub trying to shave her legs, and the razor blades keep snapping off. John wanted it dropped; Bobbie thought it was cute and wanted to keep it. That was the whole freaking thing! I published this, and that was enough to put me on John Byrne's sh-- list forever.

He did approach me once when he was interested in suing Todd McFarlane. In an issue of *Spawn*, two members of the KKK were named Pete and Johnny. I refused to go in with John to sue Todd for the simple reason that I didn't think we had a chance in hell. You can't sue someone just because they've wounded your ego. It's a waste of time.

For more on Peter David's career—including his thoughts on his Aquaman, Young Justice *and* Soulsearchers *runs and his feud with Todd McFarlane—head to* **wizarduniverse.com.**

RAZOR BYRNE Believe it or not, the root of the long-standing feud between Peter David and John Byrne was She-Hulk shaving her legs.

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THE 'OTHER' MEN

Peter David, Reginald Hudlin and J. Michael Straczynski offer cryptic teases and promise good old-fashioned surprises for October's Spider-Man event

Marvel claims Spider-Man's "The Other: Evolve or Die" event may just be the biggest, most earthshaking and character-changing event ever unleashed on their arachnid hero—but if you want to know what happens, don't even dare trying to pry any secrets from the creators working on it.

Writers Peter David, Reginald Hudlin and J. Michael Straczynski want to talk...they really do. You can see it on their faces. They want to explode with tales of the return of Morlun, one of Spidey's most deadly foes, and about how the four-month epic will see each writer take over all three Spider-Man titles for a month at a time. (David kicks things off in October with his *Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man* #1, *Marvel Knights Spider-Man* #19 and *Amazing Spider-Man* #525, followed by Hudlin in November and then JMS in December before the three return to their regular writing duties in January to close out the story.) They want to talk about how Peter Parker seems to be heading for a nervous breakdown, how he'll face an all-new villain named Tracer and how this story will forever change the way fans look at Spider-Man. But then, they go silent.

"That's the funny thing," boasts David. "I can say nothing! But hey, wait until you see it."

The three will say this—they want this event to be a big surprise for fans, and they're pretty sure with what they have in store, the payoff will be well worth the anticipation.

"When I was a kid, I didn't go on the Internet," explains Hudlin. "I went to the store. There was no setting up. I didn't need to be set up. I just read the book and hoped the next issue was there when I came back. For 'The Other,' just playing out the logical steps of this story leads you to a lot of interesting places. And where there's something interesting, there's also some ass-kicking going on."

THE DA VINCI CODE Judging from this piece of Joe Quesada promo art, "The Other" will deal with how Spider-Man's body operates.

What little is known—or that the writing trio will admit—is that Morlun, very old (we're talking hundreds of years) and almost unstoppable foe, will return to drain the life force he feeds on from Spider-Man, and Spidey may not be up for the task of taking him out this time.

"Peter knows something is wrong with him," says Straczynski, who added a cosmic element to Spider-Man's origin in *Amazing Spider-Man* over the last four years. "He knows something isn't right."

"The mythos is really ratcheted up another level," adds Hudlin. "When you look at what JMS has been building toward and the payoff with this storyline, it's going to freak people. My favorite part of this arc is the part we can tell the least about. It's such a satisfying conclusion."

While the men behind the event won't use the words "death of Spider-Man," word is it was once kicked around the offices as a possible title. Is it possible Marvel and these three gunslingers be out to kill the Web-head?

"Spider-Man gets very badly injured," reveals JMS. "One thing we can say is that Spider-Man does get messed up. He loses an organ."

Adds David with a chuckle, "You'll put your thumb in your mouth and have a long nap." ■ MIKE COTTON

SPIDER-MAN 3

IN WHAT MAY BE THE LAST GO-ROUND FOR THE CAST, DIRECTOR SAM RAIMI HAS KEPT SECRET THE FILM'S BIG QUESTION: WHO'S THE MAIN VILLAIN?

Oh, what a tangled web Sam Raimi weaves.

From the time 2004's "Spider-Man 2" broke big at the box office, the director's been hunkered down planning the third installment of the mega-hit franchise, keeping every detail top secret. Ask the 45-year-old director about the plot and he goes as silent as a nuclear sub honing in on a target. Try to pry clues from producer Avi Arad on which villain star Tobey Maguire will face off against and the Marvel Studios head just chuckles and tosses off teasing one-liners. Inquire with producer Kevin Feige about a possible love triangle involving Peter Parker, Kirsten Dunst's Mary Jane and another party—as in Black Cat—and he drops the topic like a hot potato.

"Spider-Man 3" may just be the most highly classified project in Hollywood. And that's just how Raimi likes it. "I never want the fans to know too much," says Raimi. "I've always considered myself an entertainer. I want to please the audience. I want to wow them and thrill them and make them cry. I live for that. The fans—their opinion is so important, and it's so important to me they like the movie, that I'm afraid of being influenced by them."

Of course, with a huge budget, tons of new visual effects and a ravenous fan base that posts plot possibilities on the Internet, info's bound to leak out before the movie's 2007 release. That's where *Wizard* comes to the rescue, tackling the biggest questions: Which villain is Thomas Hayden Church ("Sideways") playing? Will MJ die? Is this Raimi's last Spider-Man adventure?

So hang on tight for a wild six-page ride as *Wizard* gears up for what could be the biggest sequel in movie history.

BY MIKE COTTON

3 IS THE MAGIC NUMBER Mystery villains, love triangles and major shake-ups will be swinging Spidey's way in his next trip to the big screen.

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR PETER PARKER IN 'SPIDER-MAN 3'?

Taking place three years after the events of "Spider-Man 2," in which Spidey fought off the eight-armed Doctor Octopus and revealed his true identity and love for Mary Jane, the third film's script is based on a treatment by Raimi and his brother Ivan, and is currently being written by "Spider-Man 2" scribe Alvin Sargent. "Alvin is writing a great screenplay," teases Raimi.

"It's the first time we mix Spider-Man and Wolverine," says Arad, before laughing, "No, no, we don't. All I can say is that there will be a lot of interesting departures in this one. Sam is writing. Alvin is writing. We have a script now, and we'll play with it until we finish the movie. I have to be careful what I say, but for number three, I feel about it like I do 'X-Men'—this could potentially be the best of the three. It's complex, and we found new things to do with our heroes and a very interesting villain. This is a big mother."

WHEN WILL IT GO INTO PRODUCTION?

Although Raimi jumped from post-production on "Spider-Man 2" directly into the third film, shooting on the project won't begin until January, 2006 in both New York—Spider-Man's hometown—and Sony's Los Angeles studios.

"I think we'll be ready to go after the first of the year," says Raimi about one of the few facts he'll even consider discussing. "I'm not sure if we'll begin in New York or L.A., though."

"We'll definitely be in [both] New York and L.A.," adds Arad.

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH PETER AND MARY JANE NOW THAT SHE KNOWS HIS SECRET IDENTITY?

Admitting that he loves his lead character is no big step for a deeply personal director such as Raimi, but he also boasts that his love is predicated on torturing the hero—both with huge villains and with the personal and emotional issues that have made Spidey a hit ever since his comic book debut in 1962.

"[Peter is] going to try to move to the next phase of his life—the next stage, young adulthood—and he's going to now be dealing with issues of self esteem and how he can carry on a relationship, which is much more complex than having an occasional date with some woman and not revealing all of your secrets to her," Raimi has said.

"Sam believes so strongly in Peter Parker's strength of character, he loves to put him through that torture to see how he will triumph, to see how he will change and how he will maintain his morals to overcome a situation," Feige says.

However, there are a few clues about a possible split between Pete and his long-time love. The casting of "That '70s Show" star Topher Grace as a possible love interest or villain makes for some very compelling speculation, with rumors swirling that he'll be the man who comes between MJ and her tights-clad hero. But Arad isn't one to tell tales.

"Some very interesting things happen to the characters in this film," Arad says simply.

IS THERE A NEW WOMAN IN PETER'S LIFE?

Reportedly, early drafts of "Spider-Man 2" featured a cameo by the Black Cat—the sexy, sultry cat burglar who falls in love with Spider-Man while loathing Peter Parker's mundane life—but the cat was cut. Could she finally appear in the third film, and possibly make a play for Spidey while he's swinging from rooftop to rooftop?

"You can never tell," says Arad. "Cats, they come they go. You never know. They have nine lives."

There's also sexy *Daily Bugle* receptionist Betty Brant (played by Elizabeth Banks of "The 40 Year-Old Virgin"), who Peter's flirted with in previous films.

"It's always a possibility," teases Feige. "We look to the same source material that the fans look to in terms of things they'd want to see or stuff we'd want to see. Sam always has stacks of comic books in the corner of his office at any given time. Anything is a possibility."

Will Mary Jane die in this film?

Would they dare? Could Sony and Marvel make a move so bold as to kill off not only Peter Parker's No. 1 love interest but also the woman he's married to in the comics themselves?

While Arad boldly states there will be some startling "departures" in the third film, Dunst doesn't see MJ biting the big one, even if her contract does expire after this film.

"I don't think they should kill Mary Jane off," says Dunst. "That would be pretty typical if they killed the girl at the end. Why doesn't the superhero ever die? It would be so sad and beautiful. He's so human too. I think if Mary Jane was alone and pregnant and he died, she could give birth to a spider-baby and carry on the series with another young boy or something like that. I hope she doesn't die. I just think that's kind of an obvious way to go: 'We have to end it, so let's just kill her.' Mary Jane is a huge, important piece of this film, as it's all about the love story."

FAMILY GUY? Will Harry Osborn (James Franco) follow in his father's armored green footsteps?

WHO ARE THE VILLAINS?

"One is going to be Kingpin—the skinny one," laughs Arad, letting you know he knows more than he'll ever reveal.

Although Sony and Marvel announced Church would play a villain and even hinted that Grace's role was that of a rogue, no one is talking about what those specific roles will be. Arad even suggests that maybe Grace's role won't be that of a villain.

"There's a lot of fun in the guessing game," Arad adds.

And the guessing game only gets more confusing with the rumors that pop up daily. Originally, speculation cited Church as a shoe-in to play Sandman—Spidey's sand-based foe—but recently rumblings have emerged that Church and Grace may actually be playing the same character, the master of disguise known as the Chameleon.

Even Church's hints are vague at best. "He's a horse of many colors," Church told sources. "Let's just say he's an amorphous collection of protons, electrons and neutrons, of different colors."

With no confirmation on the horizon, rumors continue to fly, speculating that Grace may be playing a "Bizarro Spidey" take on Venom, or even stepping into the classic green and yellow as high-voltage hoodlum Electro.

"I don't know [when we'll announce the villains]," explains Feige. "Traditionally, we've done it just before principal photography [which is slated to begin in January]. But I don't know for sure."

One thing's for certain. The threat will be even bigger this time, which means you can probably count on seeing multiple villains. (For more on the fan's choices for Spider-Man's villains, **see sidebar on p. 74**)

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THOMAS HAYDEN CHURCH AND TOPHER GRACE?

Again with this? Won't you give up? No? Okay, us neither. While there's still few clues to whom Church—best known for his recent Oscar-nominated turn in "Sideways" and his good-hearted but dumb mechanic on TV's "Wings"—or Grace—who's gone from a television nice guy to big-screen leading man with films such as "In Good Company"—will be playing, the two are training and changing their looks for their biggest and most high-profile roles yet.

Grace was recently spotted in Hollywood sporting lighter hair and told *People* magazine it was for his big role in "Spider-Man 3."

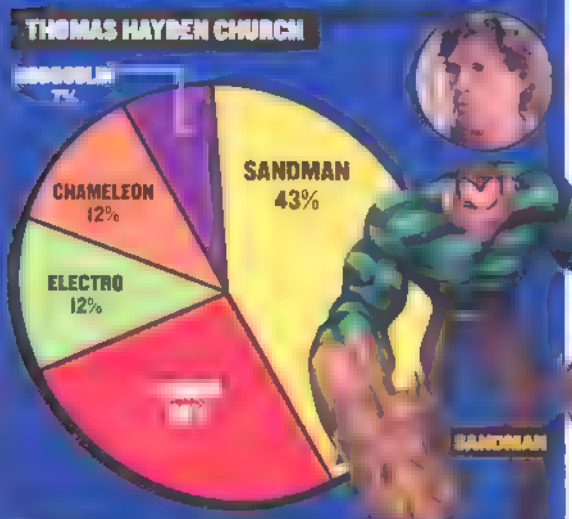
It's for reasons that are legit," he told *People*. "I'm not supposed to talk about the blonde hair or 'Spider-Man.'"

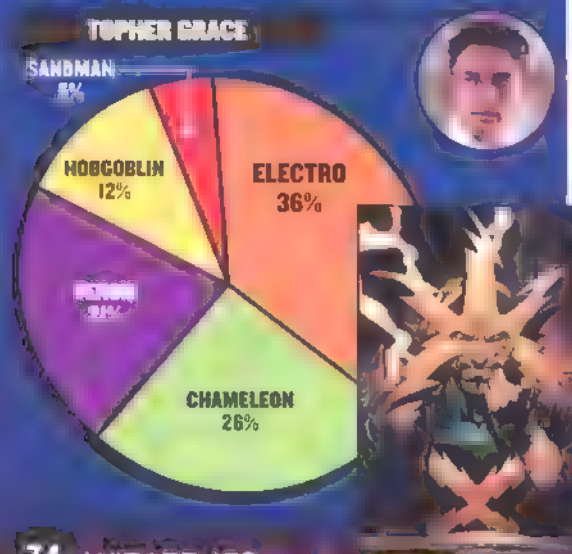
Chimes in Raimi: "I couldn't be more excited about the direction we are taking the continuing adventures of Peter Parker. Topher Grace is an extraordinarily talented actor and will be perfect for the complexities of the role we are developing."

Church also refuses to reveal his part in the drama, even turning down "Tonight Show" host Jay Leno's invitation to tell him privately backstage during a recent appearance and claiming that he won't even tell his own mother. In fact, Church says the only one who does know—outside of insiders such as Raimi and Arad—is his cat Beans.

VOTING FOR VILLAINS

Who the fans think Church and Grace will play in 'Spider-Man 3'





WILL THE GREEN GOBLIN RETURN?

After making a cameo in "Spider-Man 2," Willem Dafoe ("Platoon"), who played original Green Goblin Norman Osborn in the first "Spider-Man" film, might return for another stab at Spidey in the third film, even if it's brief. Even from the dead, Norman has antagonized his son Harry (James Franco) through delusions into taking vengeance on Spider-Man, which led Harry to find his father's Goblin costume and weapons at the end of the second film.

The entire adventure seemed to be leading to Harry either becoming the second Goblin or possibly even moving on to become the Hobgoblin, but no one will confirm that yet. Adding a third villain to the film might be a little much for even Raimi and team to handle.

"Perhaps you will see him again," says Arad of the glider-riding Goblin.

"I obviously can't talk about it, but it's weird everyone asks about the Hobgoblin [since] Harry Osborn never became the Hobgoblin—he became the second Green Goblin," Franco said publicly. "I think Marvel and Sam [Raimi] and everybody, they want it and they don't want to be obvious."

WHY IS SPIDER-MAN FACING TWO ENEMIES?

Well, according to some sources, he might not be facing two villains...or at least not the ones you think. While the speculation has centered on Church as Sandman, Venom or the Chameleon, with Grace possibly playing either one of Chameleon's alter egos or another super-secret baddie, Arad says he's never admitted Grace would be playing a physical antagonist to Spider-Man. "Who says they are both villains?" he questions.

In the previous two films, Raimi's shied away from overcrowding his films with too many villains—a problem in other franchises such as the later "Batman" films. But in a third film aiming to be bigger and better than any previous superhero adventure, there's no telling what the director plans to unleash on fans this time around.

WILL JOHN JAMESON RETURN AS MAN-WOLF OR VENOM AFTER BEING LEFT AT THE ALTAR BY MJ IN 'SPIDEY 2'?

There's been no word yet on whether or not *Daily Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson's astronaut son—played by Daniel Gillies—will return for the third film, but sources intimated late in the second film's production that the younger Jameson might return from space—as he did in the comics—as Man-Wolf or even bring back the evil symbiote Venom that would give him the ability to torture Peter Parker and Spider-Man for stealing his one-time fiancée. "Perhaps you will see him again," is all Arad will venture to say.

WILL THE ENTIRE CAST RETURN FOR THIS MOVIE?

Expect everyone to return for what will be the cast's biggest payday yet. With Maguire and Dunst signed on and everyone else—from J.K. Simmons as J. Jonah Jameson to Rosemary Harris as Peter's loving Aunt May and even Bruce Campbell in another cameo—rapidly getting ready for production, expect a full boat that's only getting fuller with Church and Grace's mysterious roles added to the cargo.

And don't be surprised if Dylan Baker ("Head of State")—who played Peter's college professor Curt Connors, who in the comics eventually becomes the villainous Lizard—makes a return after only a brief cameo in the second film. Baker was originally cast in a much larger role in the first film that would have set him up as a possible villain in later sequels.

WHAT COMIC ARTISTS WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THIS FILM, LIKE ALEX ROSS AND PHIL JIMENEZ DID IN THE FIRST TWO MOVIES?

Ross blessed fans (and Sony) with the opening credits art for "Spider-Man 2," using his unique and highly realistic painted style to retell some of the major moments of the first "Spider-Man" film, while Jimenez's hands appeared as Peter Parker's as he draws and designs his first costume in film one. Which comics-biz big shots will show up this time? Arad says it's too early to finalize any names just yet, but insists that Marvel always keeps the biggest names in comics in mind. May we suggest legendary *Spider-Man* artist Todd McFarlane?

WILL THE LOSS OF OSCAR-WINNING VISUAL EFFECT SUPERVISOR JOHN DYKSTRA AFFECT THE FILM?

"Not at all," says Arad.

Although Dykstra helped create and mastermind the amazing visuals in both previous "Spidey" flicks, he's moved on to "Hot Wheels" with director McG. Scott Stokdyk, the visual effects supervisor for "Spider-Man 2," will move in to take over for his former mentor.

"I'm discussing it now with Sony Pictures and ImageWorks on how to create some of the different characters," explains Raimi. "What improvements, for instance, when we do Spider-Man—it'll be subtle, and the audience probably won't even be aware of them. But to that character specifically, how can we improve his style of movement, his density, the sense of weight? How can we take the next step? We're really trying to shoot for a level of reality that we haven't yet achieved with the 'Spider-Man' films."

WHAT OTHER VILLAINS MIGHT SHOW UP IN 'SPIDER-MAN 3'?

BLACK CAT

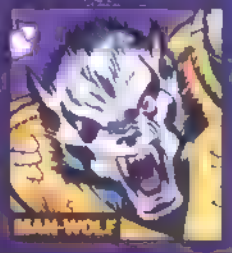
Originally planned for a cameo role in "Spider-Man 2," Felicia Hardy—the longtime love interest for Spider-Man—was cut due to time and story constraints. The sexy black-clad thief, who loved Spider-Man but couldn't stand Peter Parker's normal-guy side (even forcing Spidey to wear his mask during the horizontal hip-to-hip), may be primed to make a long-awaited appearance in the third film, not only as a villain, but also as the third corner in a Peter-MJ-Black Cat love triangle.

LIZARD

Though Dr. Curt Connors had a more human-only cameo in "Spider-Man 2," rumor has it that the one-armed scientist who uses genetic engineering to turn himself into the man-sized (and man-eating) Lizard could reappear in "Spider-Man 3." And since the parts played by veteran character actor Dylan Baker, who's done his share of dark roles ("Happiness"), Raimi could easily create the definitive vision of the Lizard.

MAN-WOLF

John Jameson (Daniel Gillies) never made it to space in "Spider-Man 2," but after being left at the altar by Mary Jane, he might come back with a surprise for Spidey. In the comics, the son of *Daily Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson comes back from a Moon mission as the powerful and hungry Man-Wolf, and it wouldn't be surprising if Raimi—a huge fan of classic horror—might want to throw a bone to the were-wolf genre.



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THE PROS PICK THE TOP FOES

The villains who comics' biggest names want to see in 'Spider-Man 3'

DR. CONNORS

"Since we introduced Dr. Connors in the last film, I'd like to see that pay off in this one. I also love the idea of Larry David as the Vulture." —*Marvel Knights Spider-Man* writer Reggie Hudlin

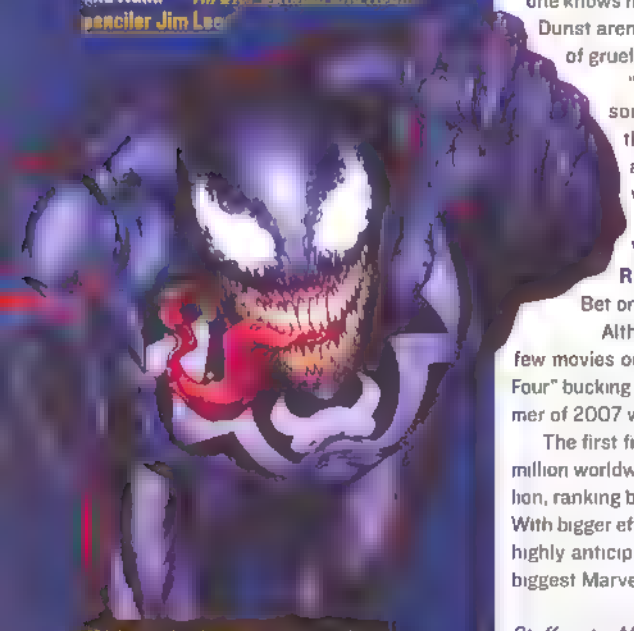
"Just begin the movie with a bang, with Spider-Man fighting the Sinister Six. And then, it can all work back around to be about how Harry Osborn becomes a new version of Green Goblin." —*Justice* painter Alex Ross

"[Thomas Haydon] Church would make a good Sandman, and I can see Topher [Grace] would be a good Mysterio. But the Scorpion and Rhino would be cool." *Ultimate Spider-Man* artist Mark Bagley

"I was just asking my kids which villain they most wanted to see in 'Spider-Man 3.' We all answered with just one word: Venom!" —"Ghost Rider" director Mark Steven Johnson

"Venom would be a great character to bring in at this point. If you seriously wanted to put someone up against him, I would say Venom 'cause he's mad." —*The Sentry* writer Paul Jenkins

"I'd rather see another hero used as a foil rather than a third-rate bad guy. Maybe Spider-Man and Hulk." —*All Star Batman and Robin* penciler Jim Lee



ONE DEADLY VENOM The smiling psychotic symbiote is on comics pros' movie-villain hot list

HOW MANY SPIDER-MAN MOVIES DOES SONY PLAN ON CRANKING OUT?

With each film getting better and better, Sony was already eyeing up to six flicks before "Spider-Man 2" even hit theaters.

Amy Pascal—head of Sony Pictures—announced she believes Spider-Man to be a character that can swing through theaters every few years or so. "This is a story that's designed to be serialized," she said in interviews. "I'd like to see this go on forever. Or for at least as long as I'm here."

THREE FOR THE SHOW Will Sam Raimi/Tobey Maguire/Kirsten Dunst commit for a fourth—or fifth—Spidey installment?

WILL RAIMI AND THE CAST RETURN FOR FUTURE SPIDER-MAN FILMS?

Only time and box office bucks will tell.

The Holy Trinity of Raimi, Maguire and Dunst are only contractually committed for three Spider-Man films, and anything more would necessitate new contracts. And with the enormous success of the first two films, any or all of them would undoubtedly want significantly more money, which sends the prospective sequel's budget skyrocketing (witness the "X-Men" franchise as an example).

While Raimi is become more and more enthusiastic about each new film, and while his love of the character is obvious, like any talented director, he's keeping his options open after the third part of the Spider-trilogy. And while work on a "Spidey" sequel may start out as a family reunion for the cast and crew, everyone knows how ambitious each picture is, and even stars such as Maguire and Dunst aren't sure they'd be willing to come back for more films after months of grueling shoots and hard work on this third installment.

"I doubt Tobey would come back for a fourth or a fifth," Dunst told sources. "I don't know what will happen in the third movie. I just think three's a good number. How many movies can you really make about it before you want to stop it while it's still great? You don't want to keep going."

WILL THIS INSTALLMENT GO ON TO SHATTER BOX OFFICE RECORDS LIKE THE FIRST TWO?

Bet on it.

Although the summer of 2005 looked like a bust for Hollywood, with few movies outside of Marvel's other potential superhero franchise "Fantastic Four" bucking the season's lowered expectations, "Spider-Man 3" will rule the summer of 2007 when it hits theaters.

The first film blew the doors off every theater it entered, taking in over $821 million worldwide; the second just missed that mark, pulling in another $784 million, ranking both films among the top 16 highest-grossing films in movie history. With bigger effects, a strong story, the entire cast returning and some of the most highly anticipated plot threads still dangling, expect "Spider-Man 3" to be the biggest Marvel movie since... "Spider-Man 2"!

Staff writer Mike Cotton has always believed himself to be a perfect nemesis for Spider-Man, using the moniker Kraven the Nicotine.

INFINITE CRISIS
THE 12-STEP PLAN FOR SUCCESS

CRISIS ALMIGHTY

On the eve of *Infinite Crisis* #1, WIZARD unearths the 12 steps used to create DC's most catastrophic event ever

BY CHRIS WARD

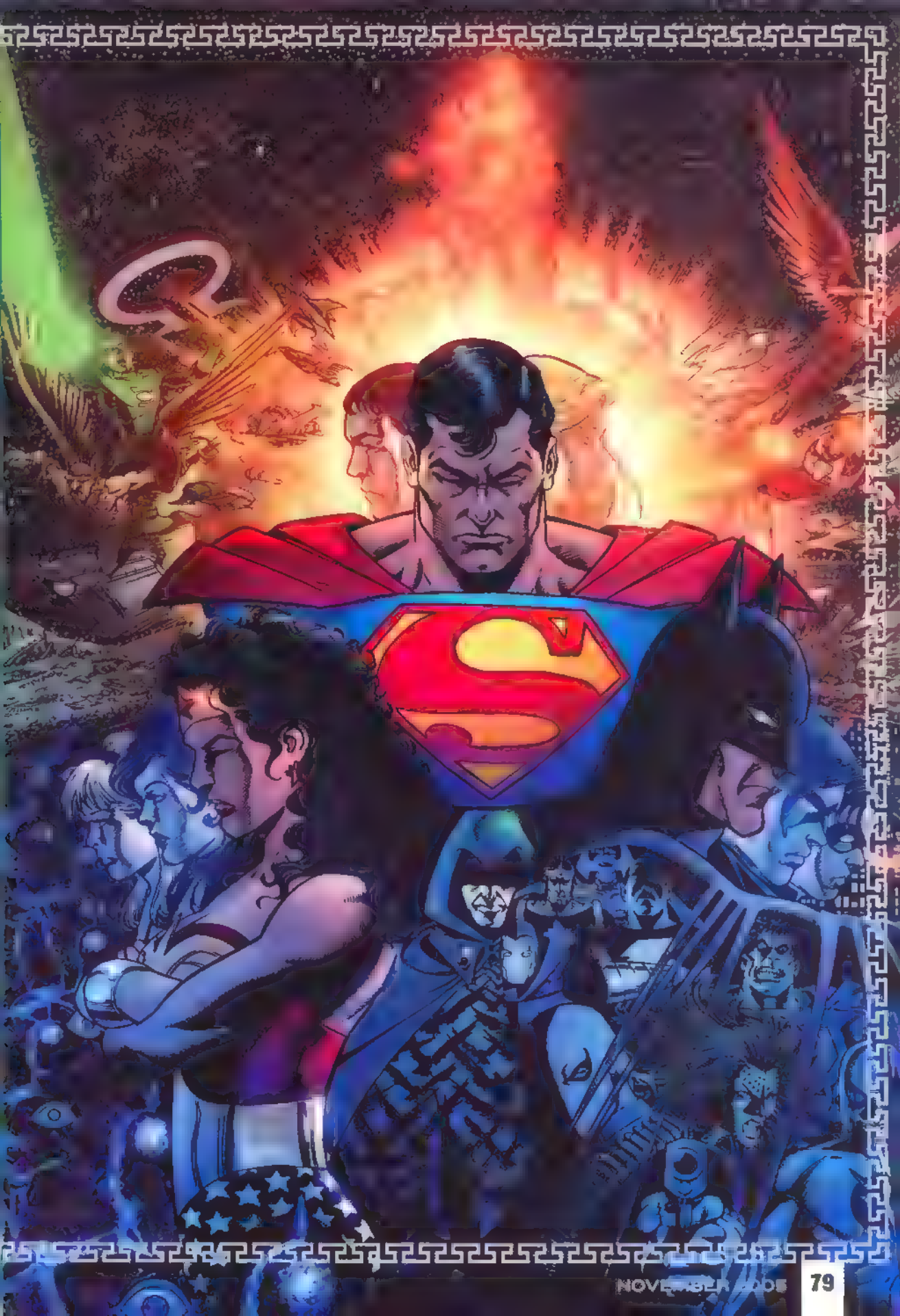
INFINITE HATRED Jeez, you talk off a bald dude and a guy with one eye, and suddenly your entire Universe is in chaos!

If you want massive bloodshed, you'd better have a massive battle plan. Or, in the case of *Infinite Crisis*, you'd better have several. The most anticipated miniseries of the year decimates the DC Universe in October when *Infinite Crisis* #1, written by Geoff Johns and penciled by Phil Jimenez, bombards the shelves. For the characters involved, it's been a long haul—end of OMACs, betrayals, magic wars, interstellar battles, alternate realities unleashed and the countless death of a Keith Giffen character.

But for the creators involved with the Countdown to Crisis, planning all this mayhem has been just as difficult.

"I already respected Marv Wolfman and George Perez for what they did [in *Crisis on Infinite Earths*], but man, these books are tough," says Johns. "They handled so many characters, and there's just so much going on. It also gives me respect for [Brian Michael] Bendis on *House of M* and anyone who's ever tried to write one of these universe-spanning books. And now, on the eve of *Infinite Crisis* release and the 20th anniversary of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, Johns and each creator involved with the Countdown to *Infinite Crisis* event kick-off can take a step back, smile...and pass out from exhaustion.

Want to see how a massive event like *Infinite Crisis* [illegible] from the ground up? DC did it in 12 simple steps.



1. THINK BIG

VP-Executive Editor Dan DiDio wanted to get some blood on his hands.

DC was chugging along comfortably in 2003, until DiDio—DC's charismatic editorial leader—opted to turn his own universe upside down and shake the hell out of it. It was time to trade complacency for crisis. An *Infinite Crisis*. With the 20-year anniversary of the company's continuity-wiping *Crisis on Infinite Earths* approaching, it was the perfect time to tear worlds asunder once again.

"If you look at it, every 10 years was something like *Crisis* or *Zero Hour* and 10 years later we have *Infinite Crisis*," says DiDio. "It's a little bit of a housecleaning, it's a little bit of resetting the clock, it's a little bit of re-establishing everything that matters in the DC Universe and it's a great jumping-on point for everybody who hasn't had a chance to sample our stuff yet."

It was also the chance to create a better DCU by way of reverse-engineering, violently taking everything apart to see what makes it really tick, and then putting it back together again.

"Dan wanted to do this big thing from the start," adds *OMAC Project* writer Greg Rucka. "But he didn't know what it would be. Then Brad [Meltzer] pitched him *Identity Crisis* and he said, 'That's the start of it.' And then the rest of us saw the scripts and began weighing in. And once you get it going, [the planning] becomes the most fantastic nightmare process you can ever have."

As *Identity Crisis* was preparing to launch, Johns pitched DiDio on a very rough version of his story for a new *Crisis* mini-series that was to follow Meltzer's—a sequel to the original *Crisis on Infinite Earths*—and the DCU's largest storyline to date was set in motion. But DiDio and Johns couldn't execute it alone.

2. ASSEMBLE YOUR ARCHITECTS

DiDio has his Society of Super-Creators on speed dial, and he picked up the red phone immediately when it came time to give Johns' *Infinite Crisis* mini-series its foundation.

In 2003, at the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank, Calif., DiDio assembled writers Johns, Rucka and Judd Winick and editor Eddie Berganza to erect the support beams for their biggest crossover event ever. It was risky, and some creators had to be won over at first.

"The rumblings we had heard [going into the meetings] were that it's kind of an event thing along the lines of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*—which, with that as the preamble, I only had mild interest in," says *Green Arrow* writer

DIBS ON SUCCESS Killing the Elongated Man's wife and tearing open old JLA wounds wound up being an effective marketing strategy for DC.

THE EYES HAVE IT Hey, don't laugh—satellites can be evil, as demonstrated by Brother Eye (left), one of many causes of the Crisis.

Winick. "It's like, 'Okay, yet another crossover and yet another event.' I'd even heard Dan was hoping it would cross over into every book in the DCU which, again, I thought was another lousy idea people have tried before with a certain amount of success and a certain amount of failure." But Winick and others came around to DiDio's thinking once the group, along with writer Jeph Loeb, got together for drinks that evening and began talking about the story. The more they discussed it, the more they realized each plot point held up no matter how they tried to pull it apart. Story beats were broken down into quarters, then months and finally various acts across the DC titles. This could work, they realized

Over a series of days, the tricky and intricate story pacing was officially laid out via giant blueprints, charts and Post-It notes DiDio still keeps locked in his office, to keep tabs on the story as it progresses

"Do you know why *Infinite Crisis* works? Because there's no writer who says, 'This is my thing,'" adds Rucka. "You can't look at it and say, 'This is X-writer's project.' You can look at it and say, 'Well, Geoff, Greg and Judd are responsible for the core, but the writer's ego has nothing to do with what's going on here We're here for the story."

3. CREATE CONTROVERSY

"Worlds will die!" screamed ads for the original *Crisis on Infinite Earths* as DC prepared to up the ante on controversy in 1985. It's called a crisis for a reason, folks, and DiDio and Co knew massive death and destruction would also be a must in both their sequel and all the events preceding it But the controversial story beats the creators came up with would make the destruction of a multiverse seem like kids stuff

"I'm not a fan of doing controversy for controversy's sake," says Johns. "I think that's ridiculous, and I don't think many writers set out to do it. But there's always controversy when you're doing a story this big."

DC would get personal this time, kicking the entire event off with the brutal rape and murder of Elongated Man's wife, followed by the revelation of the JLA mindwiping Batman and even the death of beloved characters such as Blue Beetle and Max Lord months later Some readers were ticked off and some were thrilled, but the shockwaves would have everyone buzzing about DC once again.

"There was a hit list discussed at the initial meetings," says Winick. "A discussion of characters who would be injured or changed—or perish."

Everyone knew from the start that the story might not always be a happy one, but it would be an important one

"If you go easy on the characters, there's no point in telling the story," says Rucka. "And, inevitably, the last step is that you start to come up with things that will make your characters miserable The more miserable, the better And preferably the more violent, as well "

Adds DiDio, "The fans are going to get angry, and that's good because that means they're involved. But the one thing we'll never do is let them feel cheated."

4. AMP UP YOUR VILLAINS

Two years ago, if you had told us DC was preparing to launch an event where the world's strongest heroes would be faced with threats like the Calculator, Max Lord and Dr. Light, we'd have committed you to Arkham Asylum with the rest of the loonies. But somehow, the creators found a way to take a giant roster of goons from DCU history—from Captain Boomerang to Deadshot to the Secret Society of Super-Villains—and make them downright evil for this event.

"I was sick and tired of seeing villains I like treated like crap and given the short shrift," remembers Meltzer. "I tried to deal with villains as realistically as I've dealt with heroes. I just felt all the attention usually goes to making the hero realistic and feasible, while the villains are cackling idiots out of bad Batman films. It's easy to do Luthor. It's easy to do the Joker. The harder part is saying, 'Can I make the Monocle interesting? If I can make people care about *them*, they'll be along for the ride."

After the success of *Identity Crisis*, a plethora of baddies once thought to be laughingstocks suddenly became viciously viable in books like Gail Simone's *Villains United* and Johns and Allan Heinberg's "Crisis of Conscience" arc in *JLA* #115-#119.

"We basically said, 'These villains have to be real threats,'" says Johns, who made a rep for himself by revamping rogues in *Flash* and *JSA*. "They've got to be as tough as the heroes are, or tougher, because that makes our heroes stronger. There's nothing better than having a hero go up against someone more powerful and smarter than them and winning anyway because they're doing the right thing. That's why I like making villains capable, powerful and nasty, because it makes our good guys look that much better."

"If they're all pushovers and idiots, it's not much of a story, is it?" adds Rucka. "So, that was the mandate: If the heroes are going to bring their A-game, the villains have to as well."

As the planning continued, the "no idiots" mandate extended to the goofiest corners of the DC villain universe.

"We had an interesting discussion about the '#1' sign hanging from Bizarro's neck," adds DiDio. "One of the things that occurs in [*Infinite Crisis*] is that the sign gets destroyed, and in some ways it signifies turning Bizarro from a comedic character to a much scarier character."

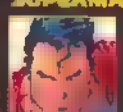
[illegible]-PACK The year's most amped-up villain, Secret Six leader Catman, kissed his mort status goodbye.

THE RUNDOWN

Everything you need to know about the DCU's major players—heroes and villains—as they head into '05's biggest event. BY SEAN T. COLLINS

THE HEROES

SUPERMAN



The leader of the now-disbanded Justice League was weak while mind-controlled by telepathic Checkmate head and IMAC Project founder Max Lord, nearly killing teammate Batman. Though Wonder Woman killed Lord to save Superman, the Kryptonian is deeply disappointed with the Amazon for her actions. "Superman's devastated that the League hasn't held together, and he wants desperately to fix that," says Johns. Every writer should [illegible]. Superman now knows the knowledge that, according to Mr. Mxyzptlk, all that will happen in reality is he will lose his wife, Lois Lane.

WONDER WOMAN

Embracing her role as an Amazon warrior, Diana has recently adopted a no-nonsense attitude that disturbs many of her fellow heroes, especially Superman. It was she who broke Max Lord's neck, freeing Superman from his mental control but also freeing the Brother Eye satellite to become sentient and unleash the OMACs at will. Brother Eye also broadcasted the killing worldwide.

BATMAN

The Dark Knight's alliance to his JLA colleagues' handling of the villainous Dr. Light led to his own memory being tampered with by the heroes. After figuring out what happened years later, Batman used pirated Kord technology to create [illegible] technology to create

like system used to spy on the Earth's metahumans. But billionaire Max Lord secretly stole the Brother Eye tech away from Batman and used it to create the lethal OMACs.

GREEN LANTERN

Hal Jordan, [illegible] becoming the villain Parallax, Hal Jordan became the host of the Spectre, the Spirit of Vengeance. After discovering that Parallax was actually a cosmic fear entity that possessed him, Jordan separated from the Spectre (leaving it heartless and vulnerable), defeated Parallax and became Green Lantern once again, serving as a go-between for the most fearsome of the [illegible]

THE FLASH

Wally West battled many of the formerly mind-wiped rogues whose true villainous natures were [illegible] as rogues the Top. With newborn twins to care for and his nemesis Zoom a member of Lex Luthor's villainous Society, Flash has major threats to deal with.

SUPERBOY

Cloned from the DNA of both Superman and Lex Luthor, Conner Kent is actually Luthor's long-hidden secret weapon. Acting under Luthor's mind control, he smashed his Teen Titans team-

5. THE NEEDS OF THE MANY...

DiDio and the DC editorial staff could have saved themselves the headache and made *Infinite Crisis* a self-contained mini-series taking place in an Elseworlds pocket universe. But instead, DiDio and his Crisis crew undertook the enormous task of connecting this event to every book in the DCU, while striving to not step on creators' toes by forcing crossover scenarios and storylines down their throats.

"I've done a lot of crossovers where you don't have a choice, so we gave everyone as much choice as we could," says Rucka. "They have a laundry list of things to choose from, and they even had the option of saying, 'I don't wanna.' And that was unique in my experience—'You can play if you want to, but you don't have to. And if you *want* to play, we have a buffet table. Would you like an OMAC from column A, or a Villain United from column B?'"

The core Crisis architects strived to provide enough story and character options for the rest of the DC talent, so that tie-ins weren't forced and previously planned storylines weren't undermined or tossed.

The character and story links would ultimately result in a more cohesive universe and add to the already epic quality of the event—stretching across all books in the DCU, from *Breach* to *Nightwing* to *Seven Soldiers: Zatanna*.

"It's an enormous difference, because it allows the writers and editors on these books to bring things in organically," says Rucka. "It doesn't look like it's being shoved in your face. And, speaking as a writer, the last thing you want is someone coming in and saying, 'You have to tell this story, you son of a b---- '"

6. KEEP 'EM GUESSING

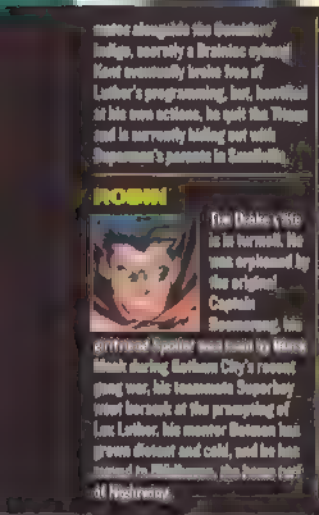
When DC released their *Prelude to Infinite Crisis* one-shot in June—a 96-page "clip show" of sorts, mapping out two years' worth of clues, hints and important moments that set up *Infinite Crisis*—the creators could proudly say, "We told you so." The book illustrates the big picture DC claimed to have had all along and lays out many of the meticulous clues discussed early on in editorial sessions.

"You can look at *Adventures of Superman* a year ago, and there's Mr. Mxyzptlk saying, 'Something's going to haaappennnn!'" says Rucka. "And because it's Mxyzptlk, you don't really pay attention."

Still, *Prelude* doesn't even touch on the elements of surprise, such as the surprise death of Maxwell Lord, or actual plot details of the tightly guarded *Infinite Crisis* series. DC even kept the title of *Infinite Crisis* a secret until the *Countdown to Infinite Crisis* one-shot (originally solicited as *DC Countdown*) hit the stands in March, throwing retailers and readers for a loop.

"The plan was always to spin the story on its ear every three or four months," says DiDio. "We've gone from Max Lord, who looks like he's going to be the master villain in the DCU,

SAY 'TEASE' Readers couldn't tell from the *Countdown* cover above that it was Blue Beetle who got plugged at the end of the issue.

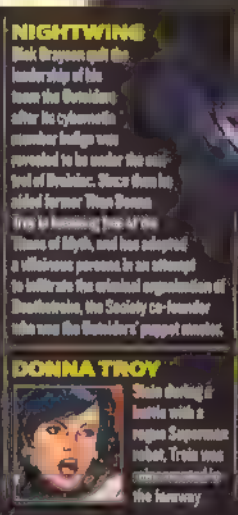


ROBIN

The Duke of Nite is in turmoil. He was orphaned by the original Captain Boomerang, his girlfriend Spoiler was killed by Black Mask during Gotham City's recent gang war, his teammate Superboy went berserk at the prompting of Lex Luthor, his mentor Batman has grown distant and cold, and he has

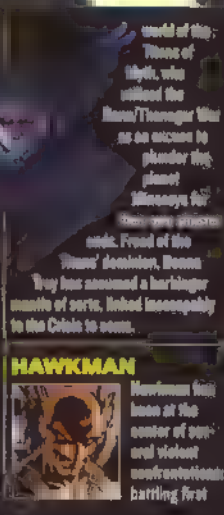
NIGHTWING

Dick Grayson quit the leadership of his team the Outsiders after its cybernetic member Indigo was revealed to be under the control of Brother Blood. Since then he sided former Titan Deacon Troy in becoming host of the Titans of Myth, and has adopted a villainous persona in an attempt to infiltrate the criminal organization of Brotherhood, the Society co-founder who was the Outsiders' puppet master.



DONNA TROY

Was during a battle with a rogue Superman robot, Troy was



HAWKMAN

Hawkman has been at the center of several violent confrontations battling first

CAPTAIN MARVEL

The World's Mightiest Mortal and

ZATANNA

This powerful sorceress was a JLA rookie when a group of her teammates convinced her to use her magic to manipulate various villains in order to erase their knowledge of the heroes' identities. This proved ironic when Batman's mind-wipe of his discovery of their actions, and Zatanna desperately sought forgiveness for this act. She performed one final mind-wipe on the Secret Society of Super-Villains, whose original mind-wipes had been undone by Despero.

THE DEAD POOL

DC has promised character death and destruction when *Infinite Crisis* #1 hits on October 12, and the rumors are flying! So, which one of these DC players do you think is most likely to get the axe? We asked fans to vote on our poll at wizarduniverse.com, and here are the results:

Looks like fans still think the Clifton/Bellerive/Maguire JLA members are game for the next wave of mutilation, as Booster's fate doesn't look promising. "They killed one half of the comedy team, so why not go ahead and kill the other half?" says one fan. "You can't have Abbott without Costello, or Joey without Chandler—and you can't have Booster without Beetle." In the "Other" category, readers speculate Tobin of Ghost, Hyde Rogers, Catman and even Wonder Woman as next to go. "She'll be replaced by Donna Troy!" says one conspiracy-minded voter. ■ CB

to a reveal that it's Brother Eye. And I have to believe, and I think the fans should believe, that there will be a couple more twists and turns along the way before we really know what's going on behind the curtain."

7. DELIVER ON THE HYPE

With the announcement of a brand new Crisis event came an unstoppable force sweeping across the DCU landscape and threatening to swallow everything in its path. But it ain't anti-matter—it's called "the great hype." With the biggest names at DC attached to the project, the sheer epic nature of the event and the increasing tension and anxiety swelling behind the release of *Infinite Crisis* #1, hype was an inevitable monster DC knew it would have to contend with. But right off the bat, the Crisis creators developed an anti-hype weapon: It's called the "just don't suck" gun. By putting storytelling first, the Crisis creators kept focused and left the cart behind the horse where it belongs.

"There are people that sell their books by hype, and there are people that sell their books by lying," says Rucka. "It's a cliché, but the proof is in the pudding. We were doing everything we could to make sure these stories had impact and resonance and that they were good. We've stumbled occasionally, but this is a huge undertaking, so we're doing pretty damn well."

8. GIVE CHARACTER TO CHARACTERS

"There are no bad characters," says Meltzer. "Just bad writing."

Well, we'd argue with him on that point (Egg Fu, anyone?) but the writers behind *Crisis* have steadily taken a long line of underused, underdeveloped characters—and a few flat-out losers—and shaped them into something heartfelt and exciting. Did you ever think books starring Detective Chimp or Catman would be a gripping read? Ever think you'd nearly be brought to tears because of Sue Dibny, Elongated Man or Blue Beetle?

"If you're going to do a sequel to *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, then it's got to include everybody, and I feel like every character's just waiting to have a good story told about them," says DiDio. "The best part about Meltzer is that he was able to tell one good story with a bunch of those characters all at the same time in *Identity Crisis*. That was exciting for us to see that happen."

Following *Identity Crisis*, the B- character floodgates opened and anything seemed possible—DC's impressive roster was now truly at their disposal.

"I loved watching Calculator fight with Lex Luthor in Jeph Loeb's *Superman/Batman*," says Meltzer. "Calculator was on the level with Lex Luthor! And I almost fell out of my seat when I saw the cover to *Villains United* #1. If you would have told me three years ago that those characters would star in a top-selling series. I mean, these are the characters I liked and figured no one else would."

CRISIS THE 12-STEP PLAN FOR SUCCESS

BLUE BEETLE

Investigating an company's board maneuvers, Ted Kord researched the involvement of Checkmate, the shadowy counter-metahuman spy agency run by Beetle's former Justice League pacemaker Max Lord. Lord killed the Beetle, a.k.a. the DMAC Project into motion. Meanwhile, Beetle's weapons vault fell to the hands of the Wizard Brainiac—at least until he was killed.

MARTIAN MANHUNTER

J'onn J'onzz served a vital role as the JLA's telepathic communications link between the members during the series of disasters currently plaguing the team. Narrowly surviving a battle with the powerful alien telepath Despero, Manhunter was attempting to retrieve the JLA Watchtower's sensors indicated to be Superman, attacked him, destroying the Watchtower itself in the process.

GREEN ARROW

Recently regaining involvement in the JLA's roster, Green Arrow has been involved in several group matches with villains who've learned of the team's actions, including Society co-founder Deathstroke and the ex-mastermind Mr. Light, who captured and nearly killed the Emerald Archer.

BOOSTER GOLD

The only one of Blue Beetle's former Justice League teammates to come to his old defense, Booster narrowly escaped a murder attempt himself. He helped lead the heroes' efforts to shut down the DMAC Project, believing that the JLA's "big guns" let him and his second-string squad handle it their own way.

POWER GIRL

A superstrong JLA member with powers of an undetermined nature—in the past, they've been suggested to be Kryptonian or magical in nature—Power Girl has been plagued by bizarre hallucinations and haunted by her mysterious past. The secret of her origin, said to be tied directly to the oncoming Crisis, will be revealed in Superboy's *JSA Classified* #4.

MANHUNTER

During a recent conflict with the OMACs, Kate Price learned that the rogue government program known as the Manhunter Protocols, which created her cybernetically enhanced suit, helped lay the groundwork for the maverick virus used by the OMAC Project itself.

FIRESTORM

Young Jason Rusch was raised by Lex Luthor's Society of villains and used as a living power battery in a South American facility apparently designed to subdue all of Earth's heroes. Firestorm was freed during an assault on the facility by the Secret Six, but became a prime target for the OMACs.

"I love the DC 'D-List,' and so does Grant [Morrison], Mark [Waid], Greg and everyone here," says Johns. "We didn't have to convince anybody to include them. It was always part of the plan."

DC took a big risk enlisting some of their most unknown characters for some of their biggest stories ever told, but they also made it a point to whip much-loved iconic characters (most notably "The Big Three") back into shape.

"Consistency of character is an ongoing goal," says Johns. "But, from here until *Crisis* is over, there will also be a big change in how the characters behave and approach things. There are a lot of minor characters that are now going to be major, and we didn't even revamp Superman, Batman or Wonder Woman. We just started with these little characters, so imagine when we get to the A-list guys. All these characters have huge potential."

OH SNAP! Since Max Lord made Superman go crazy and nearly kill Wonder Woman, she gave him a special Amazonian massage.

9. DON'T REPEAT MISTAKES

Infinite Crisis isn't the first stab at a massive crossover project, and it certainly won't be the last. And in planning for the coming trauma, the Crisis creators looked to the past to examine both the best and worst ways to administer the blows to their heroes.

"We literally went through every mini-series in the DC Universe and said, 'did this succeed or fail? How did it work? Did the villain changes in "Underworld Unleashed" stick?'" says DiDio. "The longer something sticks coming out of a crossover, the more merit it gives that crossover. *Crisis on Infinite*

SASHA BORDEAUX

Bruce Wayne's one-time bodyguard, Bordeaux joined Checkmate as Black King. Max Lord's Black Knight. Horrified by Lord's murder of Blue Beetle and assaults on other metahumans through the OMACs, she leaked information of Lord's activities to Batman and was attacked by OMACs in retaliation—only to reveal biomechanical enhancements of her own, which enabled her to help temporarily defeat the OMACs worldwide, and the six-minded Secret Society of Super-Villains led by Brainiac. The conflict revealed that her status as an on-again, off-again heroine and romantic interest for Batman may have been a result of her own mind-wipe by the JLA, back when she herself was a Secret Society member.

CATWOMAN

The famed burglar/vigilante was caught up in the conflict between the JLA and the six-minded Secret Society of Super-Villains led by Brainiac. The conflict revealed that her status as an on-again, off-again heroine and romantic interest for Batman may have been a result of her own mind-wipe by the JLA, back when she herself was a Secret Society member.

THE VILLAINS

LEX LUTHOR

Driven from the presidency and to the brink of madness by Superman and Batman, Luthor returned to form the Society, a united organization of criminals bent on ridding the world of superheroes in retribution for everything they've done to the villain community—including the JLA mindwipes. He's also known to don his battlesuit and join the fray himself, as when he helped Superboy (under Luthor's mind control) attack the Teen Titans. "Lex's motivations are going to throw a lot of people for a loop in October," says Johns.

DEATHSTROKE

One of the six members of the Society's inner circle, assassin Slade Wilson is the core group's [illegible] battled the JLA to a standstill when the group suspected Dr. Light of Sue Dibny's murder. Deathstroke later rescued Light from the Teen Titans and played an integral part in [illegible]

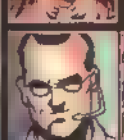
BLACK ADAM

A founding member of the Society, Teth-Adam had a violent falling-out with [illegible] former team the JSA when he installed himself as leader of the nation of Kahndaq. Though he and the JSA later defended Kahndaq against the rampaging Specire, Adam has nevertheless embraced the Society's ends-justify-the-means vision of a world without superheroes.

THE SOCIETY: INNER CIRCLE

In addition to Luthor, Deathstroke and Black Adam, the founding six-member core of the Society includes Tala Al Ghul, who killed her father Ra's to take control of his underworld empire;

Calculator, the mastermind who serves as an informant-based clearinghouse;



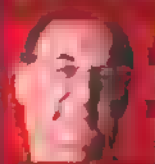
CRISIS CRITICS

industry pros weigh in on DC's 'Infinite Crisis' event

MARK MILLAR: "As a writer, it worries me that, if these books make money, we'll see the return of event-driven comics-by-committee and writers will be relegated to being the hired-and-fired script-monkeys they were for much of the '90s. That said, anything that generates excitement and sales is a good thing, so more power to them. The more books selling 100K, the better, of course. So I'm watching with a cautious optimism."

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS: "The main [illegible] I consider Geoff Johns and Phil Jimenez two friends of mine, so it's bizarre for us to be in this weird position where we're each creating the big summer whammy for the two companies. I have no idea what's coming, but it's no great to just sit back and enjoy it, at times. It's just dying for them to knock our socks off."

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN: "I'm not normally a big fan of crossovers, but *Infinite Crisis* has definitely proved that when anything inherently evil about 'events,' as long as there are insanely talented writers and artists working closely together to bring them to life. DC's got me back [illegible] every month."



JEPH LOEB: "First off, I'm in favor of *anything* that creates excitement in comics. Clearly, the momentum towards *Infinite Crisis* is *huge* and from what I've seen, no one is going to be disappointed. Quite the opposite; I see buffalo herds of people storming unprepared retailers. There'll be looting, uprising and probably some cow-tipping involved."

ED BRUBAKER: "While I'm not a fan of the ultra-connected universe concept, where you have to read A, B and C to understand D, I have to say that the stuff I've been reading of these big events has been top-notch. *OMAC Project*, in particular, is probably Greg's best superhero writing. Gail Simone is always wonderful, and they've got Geoff Johns in the wings. I can't wait to see what Geoff does, because in my mind he's about the best writer of big event crossovers going these days." ■ CW

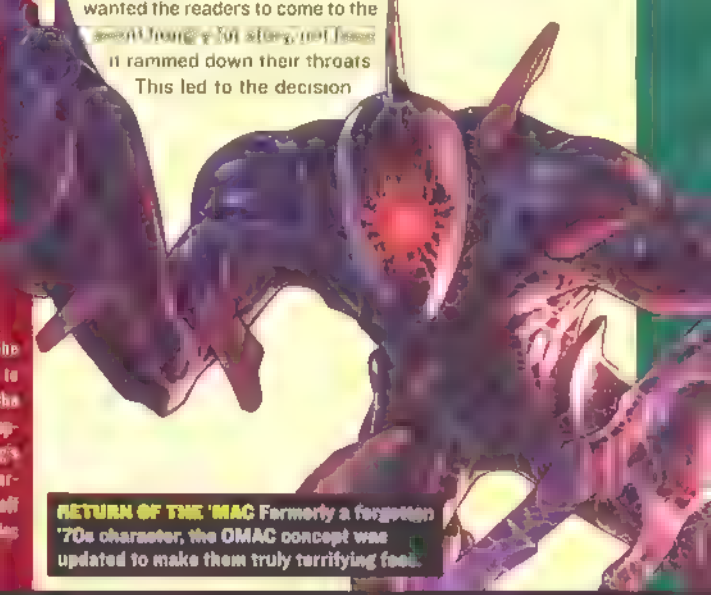
Earths had sticking power and there were a couple of things that might have held from *Zero Hour*. What we're trying to do with *Infinite Crisis* now is show these events will have long term effects. Because it will give it merit."

The team immediately knew learning from their mistakes would become key if *Infinite Crisis* was to be attempted.

"An example of one that didn't work so well, for instance, would be Joker's Last Laugh," says Rucka. "It did not, I think, thread beautifully through the DCU, for a variety of reasons. You have to give people enough time to set these things up and put it in play – and we've been setting this up for a really long time."

10. PUT ON YOUR MARKETING CAP

From a business standpoint, the build-up to *Infinite Crisis* is extremely tricky business. The entire DC Universe has been fully invested in its lengthy story for over a year and running, and there's no way to ignore its presence and ramifications throughout each title. So, if the public decides not to get on board for the long, strange crossover trip, then you're universally screwed. Because of this, the pressure exists to over-promote, but DiDio made it clear early on that he wanted the readers to come to the [illegible] it rammed down their throats. This led to the decision



RETURN OF THE 'MAC Formerly a forgotten '70s character, the OMAC concept was updated to make them truly terrifying foes.

...the Villains; and Dr. Psycho, the diminutive telepath whose hypnotic help persuade reluctant villains to unite.

DR. LIGHT

After [illegible] assaulting Sue Dibny, Light was restored to a pathetic shadow of his former villainy by [illegible]. Having recently regained his memory and become a world-class threat once more, Light has pursued violent vengeance against both the Leaguers (particularly Green Arrow) and his apprentices in the Teen Titans. According to Johns, Light himself is [illegible] an elite squad of Kobra soldiers that will start implementing Luthor's plan."

ZOOM

Believing that his evil actions will make Flash and his colleagues into better heroes, the Reverse Flash – a.k.a. Dr. Hunter Zolomon – smothered the Region War between rival Keystone City criminal factions and has been persuaded to join the Society.

CHEETAH

The [illegible] Dr. Barbara Minerva joined the Society at the invitation of Dr. Psycho. Learning how to increase her speed from Zoom, she has participated in several vicious assaults against the superhero community, including an almost fatal one against the Flash and Wonder Woman.

SINESTRO

Once a great Green Lantern, this vicious villain recently revealed that it was he who freed the four entity Parallax from [illegible] Green Entity, enabling it to possess Hal Jordan. Thought killed by Jordan, he was restored to life by Parallax and aided in his battle against Jordan and the Spectre. Defeated, he has since joined the Society.

BIZARRO

The dumb, dangerous and dark mirror image of Superman has returned [illegible] amidst the chaos of the Bizarro/Thanagar War. The OMAC onslaught and the Spectre's attacks to join up with the united villains of Lex Luthor's Society. His incredible strength and savagery make him one of the Society's big guns.

PSYCHO-PIRATE

With the ability to unravel the emotions of others, Psycho-Pirate is the only person in the universe to remember the events of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, the only [illegible] analysis in which the Multiverse was merged into one. "He's going to be taking a much more prominent role," Johns teases.

BRAINIAC

This ultra-intelligent alien android helped Luthor and the [illegible] Superboy in their assault on the Teen Titans and Outsiders through his "granddaughter" Brainiac 8, the secretly superpowered [illegible] Kenya. His plans, [illegible] to get to preserve his homeworld of Colu from its supposed destruction in the future by Booster Gold, appears to have failed.

WIPEOUT What happens when Batman disagrees with the JLA? The world's worst brain fart.

to kick things off with the *Countdown to Infinite Crisis* one-shot—a 99-cent, 80-page book written and drawn by a bevy of DC's top talent. Then, an even bigger risk: four spin-off mini-series that each led into *Infinite Crisis* (starring B-level characters) were concocted by the core Crisis creators.

"DiDio was the only person at DC who was like, '*OMAC Project* will sell well!'" laughs Rucka.

"Believe me, we had greater success on all four of the mini-series than we would have ever anticipated," says DiDio. "But the more faith we have in what we're doing, the more comfortable I feel going out in front of it and saying how good it is, because I don't feel like we're overhyping. We're just speaking the truth about the quality of the work."

DC and DiDio also engaged in an aggressive media campaign for *Identity Crisis*, gunning for coverage everywhere from *The New York Times* to *Wizard*. Strangely enough, DiDio appeared on ESPN's "Cold Pizza" morning show to promote the event. Meltzer was interviewed for *Spin Magazine* and the mini-series was mentioned on Howard Stern—locking in the crucial porn star/comic reader demographic. Gossipy media gadfly Liz Smith even commented in *The New York Post* that, "In the world of comics, this is the event of 2004," before continuing to dish hot items about fabulous designer Vera Wang. Weird! Successful mainstream coverage, yes. But also weird.

You can bet that *Infinite Crisis* #1 will make the talking-heads circuit as its Oct. 12 release date looms closer.

11. TRIM THE FAT

The *Infinite Crisis* event may be massive in scope, but in the end not every good idea for a battle, spin-off book or character reveal can make the final cut.

Originally, DC had planned a fifth mini-series to spin out of *Countdown to Infinite Crisis*, one that was ultimately scrapped. But DC is keeping quiet about the name, plot and characters involved because the story is expected to "get dusted off in late '06," according to Rucka, who was intended to write it.

"It was a great idea, and the series was there at the ground floor, but in December of last year we had the realization that we'd changed something in the story and, because of the change, [the mini-series] no longer mattered," says Rucka. "And instead of saying, 'Let's do it anyway and try to sell some books,' we decided it didn't serve the story."

Not every bad idea made the cut, either—literally. Instead

THE SOCIETY SOLDIERS

Like a Legion of Doom grown to a size beyond the heroes' worst nightmares, the Society boasts the membership of hundreds of major and minor supervillains. In addition to the inner circle, it includes the likes of Zoom, Cheetah, Solomon Grundy, the Penguin, Amazo, Dr. Light, Gorilla Grodd, Psycho-Pirate, Sinestro and countless others, making it the single strongest force on the planet.

MAX LORD

This billionaire telepath assumed control of Checkmate, the counter-metahuman spy agency, and used its resources to steal control of the Brother Eye satellite system from Batman. Lord then created the OMACs, killer Brother Eye-controlled cyborgs born from a technological virus, and murdered Blue Beetle when the hero discovered his plans. Lord was himself killed by Wonder Woman in order to free Superman from the villain's control.

BROTHER I/THE OMAC PROJECT

Brother Eye was a satellite created by Batman in response to his betrayal by the JLA. But while Max Lord took control of the system, he created the created the OMACs, or Observational Metahuman Activity Constructs: a maverick virus which assumes control of an infected human's body and turns the victim into a killer cyborg for however long is necessary to achieve its objective, then disengages, leaving the victim unaware of what he or she has done. After Lord's death, the Brother Eye satellite assumed control of the project itself and unleashed the OMACs' full fury against the heroes and villains of the DCU, killing countless metahumans, and beaming footage of Lord's death at Wonder Woman's hands across the globe.

MOCKINGBIRD

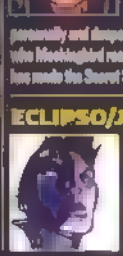
A secretive cyborg and master mind who appears only in encrypted computer transmissions that may or may not be pre-recorded, Mockingbird is the only superhero loyal to the growing power of Lex Luthor's Society. Through a combination of threats and bribes he or she persuaded the Secret Six, a group of B-list supervillains who, rather than joining the Society, are working to destroy it. Mockingbird's identity is to be revealed in *Villains United* #6, on sale Oct. 12.

THE SECRET SIX

Comprised of Deadshot, Catman,

Deadshot, Scandal, Ragdoll and a newly commanding Catman, this small group of second-string but defiant supervillains was formed by Mockingbird to combat the Society. Taking their rejection personally and desperate to discover who Mockingbird really is, the Society has made the Secret Six a top target.

ECLIPSO/JEAN LORING



Committed to Arkham Asylum following the murder of Sue Dibny in

of a snapped neck, Max Lord was originally going to be beheaded by Wonder Woman during their final confrontation in *Wonder Woman* #219. But, in the end it was an image that proved too messy and controversial to do justice to such a key moment in the story.

According to Winick, both Booster Gold and Elongated Man were both discussed as potential murder victims in *Countdown* rather than Blue Beetle. But, in the case of Elongated Man, "it almost felt too cruel," says Winick. Meanwhile, *Rann/Thanagar War* was originally named *Space War*, but was changed because...well...isn't it obvious?

12. KEEP THE MOMENTUM

You know that feeling you get at the end of the big dance when the chaperones throw the lights on, and you shuffle out amidst the confetti lamenting about the good times being behind you? Huh, maybe it's just us. But DC is making sure that their books won't suffer from post-partum Crisis depression, and plans to keep the epic rolling well after the miniseries ends.

"*Infinite Crisis* is not an event, it's a story," says Johns. "And we still have a lot of story to tell. We're working as far ahead as possible, and planning into 2007 already, but we're already looking past that to move that story forward and forward."

Between *Infinite Crisis* #4 and #5 (shipping January and February, respectively), the universe will jump ahead one year in continuity and land readers smack-dab in the middle of radical shifts in the status quo. And filling in that missing year gap is the much anticipated *52*—a 52-part (naturally!) weekly series by Johns, Rucka, Morrison, Waid and Giffen that strives to drive the Crisis story even further.

"There are ebbs and there are flows, but we're in a really good place right now," says Rucka. "Speaking pragmatically, of course, the momentum will slow at some point. Even the best TV show jumps the shark. So hopefully, when we see the shark, we'll stop before jumping it. Right now the intent is to maintain the same passion, commitment and hard work. That's the trick."

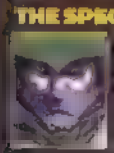
"We've got some great new creative teams, great new directions for all our books and, more importantly, with the introduction of *52* and the missing year, everyone will get the chance to see what the true scope of the DC Universe is," adds DiDio. "And I don't look at it as a stunt; I don't look at anything we do as stunts. I just look at it as big stories that are told across the entire line."

Staff Writer Chris Ward has been through his own 12-step program: Like many others, he suffers from Pac-Man addiction. Godspeed, Chris.

COUSIN UP A STORM Once believed to be related to Superman, the true origin of Power Girl will factor heavily into *Infinite Crisis*.

Identity Crisis, Loring was discovered by the black diamond that houses the evil mystical entity Eclipse, which merged with her. Using its newfound feminine charm, Eclipse literally seduced its eternal nemesis the Spectre into helping it wipe out all magic from the universe.

THE SPECTRE



The spirit of vengeance was violently separated from its human host, Hal Jordan. Left rudderless and without direction, the Spectre was seduced by Eclipse and convinced that all magic, since it defies the laws of nature, is evil and must be destroyed. The Spectre's subsequent rampage led assaults on the Shadowpact and the JSA, and to the death of the Wizard Shazam.

DESPERO

A [illegible] alien [illegible] whose unstoppable game [illegible] to [illegible] the Secret Society of Super-Villains, a long-defunct group that had learned the JLA's secret identities and had their memories cleaned of this knowledge by Zatanna and the other pre-mindwipe Leaguers. Despero came within inches of wiping out the League before Zatanna stopped him, but the assault led to the disbandment of the team.

THE SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS

Not to be confused with Lex Luther's Society (though their memberships overlap somewhat), this group, consisting of the Wizard, Chronos, Star Sapphire, Felix Faust, the Floronic Man and the Matter Master, had their memories of the JLA's secret identities unlocked by Despero. They were defeated by the League and re-mindwiped by Zatanna.

THE RED HOOD

A psychopathic killer stalking Gotham's underworld in the guise of the Joker's one-time criminal identity, the Red Hood was revealed to be Jason Todd, the former Robin killed by the Joker and now, somehow, restored to life. His return as a villain was a devastating mental and physical blow to Batman, and has brought him [illegible]

AMERICAN IDOL

'Ultimate Avengers' to feature lots of Cap and mature themes—but no Hawkeye

Although Marvel Studios and Lions Gate Home Entertainment's first direct to DVD animated film is titled "The Ultimate Avengers," script writer Greg Johnson admits, This is a Captain America story.

"Aside from the fact the impetus to assembling the Avengers becomes the driving factor for the entire movie, I'd say it's establishing one consistent character point of view throughout," said Johnson. "When all is said and done, this is Captain America's movie. He's not only reactive to the new world he's thrust into, but his actions dictate the direction of the plot. And radiating from him are the other characters, each with their own baggage and agendas, all being impacted by having Cap in their lives."

The film, coming out February 21, 2006 on DVD, is based on the first six issues of writer Mark Millar and artist Bryan Hitch's *The Ultimates*, while part two (shipping in the summer of 2006) adapts the last seven issues. According to Johnson, Marvel and Lions Gate (together known as Marvel Animated Features) will drastically change the face of animated features.

"'Ultimate Avengers' is obviously an ensemble story, so there's no doubt we're going to draw comparisons to other superhero teams," noted Johnson, who also worked on Marvel's "X-Men: Evolution" animated TV series. "While shows like 'Teen Titans' and 'Justice League' live within the BS&P [Broadcast Standards & Practices] parameters, we have the opportunity here to move beyond those boundaries. We've enjoyed the less restricted storytelling that a long-form direct-to-DVD movie provides. It is a more mature take on the heroes.

"But that extends beyond just the content to also impact both the approach and the pacing of the entire movie," added Johnson. "We have 70 to 80 minutes to tell our story, so the length of scenes, the exchanges between characters, the cadence of the dialogue and the complexity of intermingling subplots all lends itself to a more mature moviegoing experience."

The Marvel comic on which the movie is based is not for all ages and Johnson pointed out that while younger fans will be able to enjoy the huge action and story of the DVDs, Marvel is firmly committed to pleasing its older, hardcore fans as well.

"From the onset, we wanted to make a movie for the older fans," said Johnson, adding the movie is not yet rated because it isn't finished yet. "I firmly believe that if you tell an exciting, compelling story, the kids will go along for the ride. But ultimately, all age groups are looking for a superhero movie that delivers fascinating characters, cool powers and thrilling action sequences. And that's what we've strived to accomplish."

While the new film will star heroes such as Cap, Iron Man, Giant Man and even Nick Fury, Johnson said he was a little disappointed when they were forced to cut Marvel's top archer from the DVD.

"Unfortunately, we had to lose Hawkeye," groaned Johnson. "We'd worked up a very cool relationship between him and Cap. In the opening sequence during WWII in which Captain America is fighting the Nazis, we established a sharpshooter on his team that had amazing accuracy. Cap ended up saving the man's life. And then 60 years later, when the Avengers are being formed, we find out that the sharpshooter was Hawkeye's grandfather. If Cap hadn't saved him, there wouldn't even be a Hawkeye. So they had a very unique friendship as a result. But alas, we had to trim his character out for length. Hopefully we'll get to explore it in the future." ■ **MIKE COTTON**

MAN OF STEEL—LITERALLY The second in a series of collectable "Ultimate Avengers" posters drawn by Bryan Hitch features Iron Man, "The Genius." (Artwork not final image, but it's close!)

To see a sneak peek of the "Ultimate Avengers" DVD and to receive a surprise gift, check out the MLG panels at Wizard World Boston (Sept. 30-Oct. 2) and Wizard World Texas (Nov. 4-6). Guests include Greg Johnson (Boston only), Marvel Studios VP of Animation Development Craig Kyle and artist Bryan Hitch (Texas only). Stop by the Lions Gate booth for limited-edition posters drawn by Hitch, while supplies last. Visit www.wizarduniverse.com to buy tickets and for up-to-date information.

CAPTAIN AMERICA WILL GET HIS CLOSE-UP

THE REEL DEAL

Marvel to produce 10 new films on its own

After years of partnering with major movie studios like 20th Century Fox, Sony and Universal for blockbuster films such as "X-Men," "Spider-Man" and "The Hulk," Marvel Enterprises announced it wouldn't just be changing its name (now Marvel Entertainment), but also begin producing its own slate of high-profile superhero films.

In a new partnership with Paramount Pictures, Marvel Entertainment will now produce and exercise complete creative control over future feature film projects, a slate that includes Captain America, the Avengers, Nick Fury, Black Panther, Ant-Man, Cloak & Dagger, Dr. Strange, Hawkeye, Power Pack and Shang-Chi. Paramount will release and market the movies domestically.

Marvel Chairman and CEO Avi Arad said Marvel would begin attaching screenwriters to all 10 projects very soon, adding the deal is now official with the approval of a $525 million loan that will serve to finance the new venture. The Marvel bigwig says it's too early to tell which movie will be released first, but that doesn't bother him.

"We're going to commission a lot of scripts and start the race to see which moves quickest through development," Arad said of the films, the first of which may come out as soon as 2008. "We're not significantly veering from what we've been doing with the studios, but we now have the luxury of greenlight rights and better financial benefits."

"These movies are tentpoles for either summer or the holidays," Arad told the trade newspapers. "[But] no character before its time. The scripts will dictate which is first. I cannot wait to tell Captain America's story. It's a doozy."

The new deal will allow Marvel Studios unprecedented control over the characters, story, cast and crew—a prospect Arad looks forward to.

"[There is] nothing like being at the top of the food chain, like we are now," he admitted in an interview.

However, if Marvel Entertainment should go bankrupt or default on its loan, the film rights to the above 10 properties would wind up in the lender's hands. Arad is confident that won't happen, though.

"Trust me," he said, according to sources. "I've protected this universe with my life." ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

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TRAILERS...

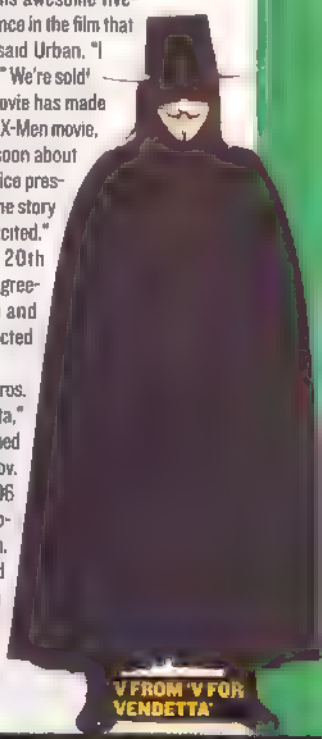
ADULT SWIM Aaron McGruder's "Boondocks" debuts on Oct. 2, and the Swim will run sneak-peeks of two new shows that don't debut until early 2006: "Lucy" (Oct. 30), about the daughter of the Devil who hooks up with a Latino DJ named Jesus, and "Minoriteam" (Nov. 6), about a team of superheroes who use racist stereotypes to combat evil. Also, a second season was announced for "Robot Chicken," the stop-motion animated show created by Seth Green and Matt Senreich that satirizes pop culture. "We're thrilled by the reaction and excited to turn it up a notch in the new season," said Green. "No toys are safe." The new season will also debut in early 2006.

DOOM According to Karl Urban ("The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers"), who plays tough Marine John Grimm in the film (out from Universal Pictures on Oct. 21 and co-starring "The Rock"), fans of the video game franchise on which the movie is based will really get a kick out of several scenes. "There's this awesome five-minute, first-person shooting sequence in the film that is very reminiscent of the game," said Urban. "I don't think it will disappoint anyone." We're sold!

FANTASTIC FOUR "The movie has made more money worldwide than the first X-Men movie, so there will be an announcement soon about 'FF2,'" said Kevin Feige, executive vice president of Marvel Studios. "We have the story coming together and we're pretty excited."

HALO Universal Pictures and 20th Century Fox have finally inked an agreement with Microsoft to produce and distribute a "Halo" movie for a projected release in the summer of 2007.

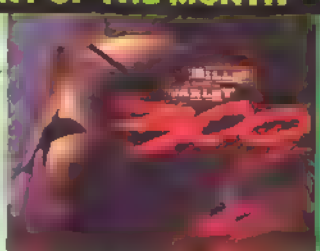
V FOR VENDETTA Warner Bros. Pictures announced "V for Vendetta," starring Natalie Portman, will be pushed back from its initially announced Nov. 4, 2005 release date to March 17, 2006 in order to give more time to post-production, according to a spokesperson. Based on the Alan Moore and David Lloyd graphic novel about a dystopian future set in England, Warners insists the move is not an attempt to distance the film from the recent bombings in London. ■



'V FROM 'V FOR VENDETTA'

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTH

300



Warner Bros. greenlit the start of production for "300," based on the Dark Horse graphic novel by Frank Miller and Lynn Varley about 300 elite Spartan soldiers who artfully battle a Persian army with 10 times its numbers in the Battle of Thermopylae (481-480 B.C.). Set in ancient Greece, the movie stars Gerard Butler ("Tomb Raider 2") and Zack Snyder (2004's "Dawn of the Dead") directs. Filming begins Oct. 17 in Montreal.

TEEN TITANS UNLIMITED

It's guest stars galore as 'Teen Titans' hits the ground running for its fifth season

When the animated Teen Titans kick off their fifth season on Nov. 5th, their biggest concern won't be Slade or Trigon--it will be finding more guest rooms in Titans Tower.

In what will be a season on the road for Robin (see A, below), Starfire (B), Cyborg (C), Raven (D) and Beast Boy (E), fans of the hit Cartoon Network show can expect return visits from old friends like Bumblebee (F) and Thunder (G) & Lightning (H), as well as the introduction of no less than nine new characters based on Titans from the comic books. It all begins with another celebrated DC Universe super team making their animated debut.

"The season begins with a two-part story introducing the Doom Patrol," said producer Glen Murakami. "We'll learn more about Beast Boy's past from when he was a member of that team, and also meet the Doom Patrol's arch enemies, the Brotherhood of Evil, which sets up our season arc."

The Doom Patrol (not shown) will consist of classic members Elastigirl, Mento, Negative Man and Robotman. Veteran voice actors Xander Berkley and Peter Onorati will provide the vocals for Mento and Robotman respectively, while Tara Strong, already the voice of Raven, will pull double duty as Elastigirl, and Judge Reinhold, best known for his turns in '80s classics "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" and "Beverly Hills Cop," will voice Negative Man. On the flipside, the Brotherhood (not shown) will include the Brain, Mallah, Madame Rouge and General Immortus.

In the present, the Titans find themselves in a race around the world against the Brotherhood, who are trying to recruit teen superheroes for their own sinister purposes.

"I always liked in the comics that the Titans went from one adventure to the next," Murakami shared. "We've spent four seasons in the Tower; I wanted to get them on the road."

Among the new characters the Titans will encounter are Russian hero Red Star (I), the horn-blowing Herald (J), the diamond-weaving Kole (K), mute body stealer Jericho (L), the feral Pantha (M), teeny bopper Argent (N), samurai Bushido (O), electric powerhouse Killowatt (P) and the time-displaced caveman Gnarkk (Q). Making return appearances will be the fire-tossing Hot Spot (R), the aquatic Tramm (S), twin speedsters Mas y Menos (T), the mammoth Wildebeest (U) and Starfire's loyal pet Silkie (V), among others.

"We've gotten a lot of demand for Jericho and I've always wanted to find a story for Gnarkk," noted Murakami.

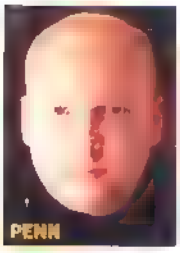
While these characters will be recognizable to longtime fans as always, the animated versions will differ slightly from their print counterparts.

"We enjoy putting our own spin on the characters from the comics," Murakami said. "A lot of these characters may not seem like standouts, but we find ways to make them cool and interesting." ■ **BEN MORSE**

UNO-TEEN TITANS The Teen Titans get by with a little help from a lot of their friends in the coming season. See story above to find out who's who!

PENN PAL

'X3' screenwriter is burning for Phoenix



Zak Penn can't get over how lucky he is. Not only has the 37 year-old writer survived three different directors on "X-Men 3" (May 26, 2006) - Bryan Singer, Matthew Vaughn and now Brett Ratner—but he's also co-written an adaptation of his favorite X-Men story of all time for the big screen (Jean Grey's resurrection as Phoenix in *Uncanny X-Men* #101). Things don't get much more exciting for a longtime comic book fan than that.

Wizard sat down with Penn for his take on writing his second X-Men film, why the Phoenix story won't be a panel-for-panel adaptation and a possible gig to direct an X-Men spin-off movie.

WIZARD: The worst kept secret in comic book movie history is that "X-Men 3" will focus on Phoenix, the evolution of Jean Grey.

PENN: Yeah, you can tell from the last movie that's where we were heading. Obviously, it won't be the same as it was in the comic book. No matter how you slice it, it's pretty important, but there's no simple way to do it. It can't just be a cameo; it'll be a big part of the movie.

Was there a character you really looked forward to adding to the X-Men movie franchise?

Definitely Phoenix. There's no question that reading the Phoenix saga was the thing that totally snatched me into the comic book world. It's my favorite X-Men story. It just seemed so much more real and dark than anything I'd read before that time. Colossus is also one of my favorite characters in the comics, so I was excited to do more with him in this movie.

Which X-Men were the toughest to write?

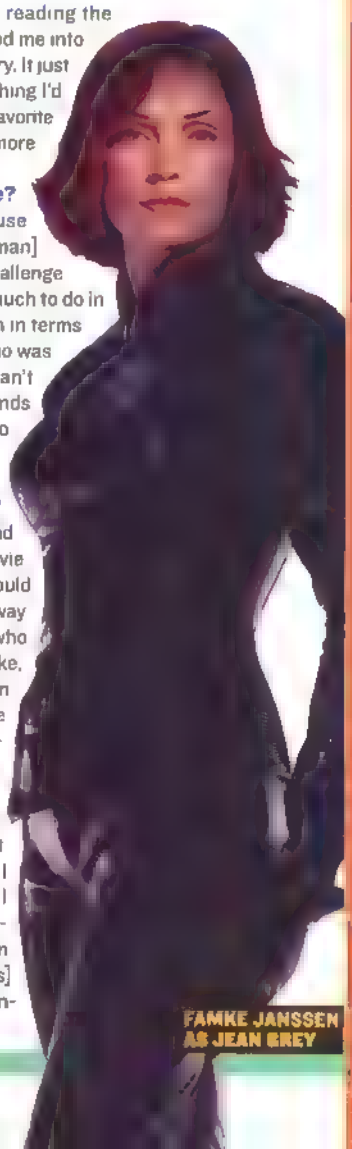
Professor Xavier, Magneto and Logan, because [Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen and Hugh Jackman] have made their voices so specific. Another challenge was Storm [Halle Berry]. She wasn't given too much to do in the first two movies, so we started from scratch in terms of approaching her character. And you know who was really hard to write dialogue for? Phoenix. You can't write what's in the comics. You can't say those kinds of lines on screen. When [Jean Grey] turns into Phoenix, you have to maintain the heightened reality of it without becoming silly.

How hard was it to be faithful to the comics?

We can't do the Sh'iar empire and battle cruiser and other galaxies [from the Phoenix saga] in this movie. It's not just that we can't afford to do it, but it would not fit with the tone of the first two movies in any way. That's difficult because you've got some fans who say, "I want to see Empress Lilandra!" And I'm like, "Well, you're not going to. Sorry!" As a comics fan myself, you have to know when it doesn't make sense to be slavishly devoted to the source material. But believe me, we hear it from the fans.

What's next for you?

I'm adapting a screenplay I was supposed to direct into a graphic novel. I don't want to give it away, but it's a science-fiction story I decided I wanted to turn into a graphic novel first before I made it into a movie. Also, part of my deal for "X-Men 3" is that I'd write and direct one of the X-Men spin-offs. The one I had talked to [Marvel Studios] about doing was the young X-Men, the next generation. I'd love to do that. ■ **MIKE COTTON**



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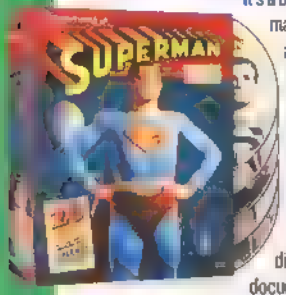
DVD BUZZ...

ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN: COMPLETE FIRST SEASON Opening with the line, "Look up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Superman!", history was made as the Man of Steel flew into households across America. The classic series comes to DVD with 26 episodes, clocking in at over 11 hours of black-and-white magic. (Oct. 18)



ELEKTRA: DIRECTOR'S CUT The back-from-the-dead assassin rejoins the DVD shelves in a two-disc set with more features than you can throw a sai at. Check out the commentary track by director Rob Bowman, a two-part making-of documentary, deleted and extended scenes, and details on weapons, costumes and storyboards. (Oct. 18)

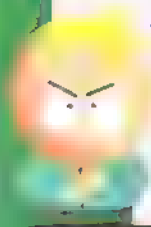
HE-MAN: SEASON 1 VOL. 1 Travel to Eternia once again with the first of four volumes collecting the epic "Masters of the Universe" series. He-Man and his allies battle the blue-skinned Skeletor through 33 episodes, plus there are two documentaries, character profiles, storyboards and scripts. (Oct. 18)

LEGEND OF ZELDA: COMPLETE ANIMATED SERIES Collect all 13 episodes faster than you can say, "Triforce of Wisdom!" Link and Princess Zelda starred in this series in 1989 as part of the "Super Mario Bros. Show." See the evil Ganon attempt scheme after scheme without suffering from gamer's thumb. (Oct. 11)

LOONEY TUNES—GOLDEN COLLECTION VOL. 3 When bunnies, ducks, pigs, roadrunners, hunters and bandits join forces, classic chaos ensues. This set includes four discs packed with 60 episodes of sarcasm, double entendres and anvils falling on heads. Features include tons of commentary, along with numerous documentaries and rare episodes, including the first-ever Looney Tune cartoon. (Oct. 25)

SOUTH PARK: SEASON 6 The DVD [illegible] "Return of the Lord of the Rings to the Two Towers" where Stan, Kyle, Cartman, Kenny and Butters liken an adult video to the Ring of Power, and "Red Hot Catholic Love," when everyone starts pooping out of their mouths. (Oct. 11)

TRIPPING THE RIFT: SEASON 1 SCI FI Channel's hilarious animated space romp comes to DVD. The raunchy show follows the exploits of starship *Jupiter 42* and its motley crew, including the ship's neurotic A.I. system Bob, the depressive engineer Gus, the sexy android Six and Captain Chode, the walking purple blob. (Oct. 25)



■ MICHAEL C. SHERMIN

DVD OF THE MONTH

THE WARRIORS: THE ULTIMATE DIRECTOR'S CUT

You know that worn-out copy of "The Warriors" DVD you have sitting on your shelf? Throw it out. On Oct. 4, you can replace it with this new edition of the cult classic, which contains four production featurettes, a deleted scene and a new edit by director Walter Hill. A staff favorite, this gritty movie about a New York street gang wrongly accused of murder stands the test of time, especially the soundtrack. Can you dig it? ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

BAT ATTACK

'Batman Begins' leads a pack of Bat DVDs

Batman Begins
Christian Bale, Michael Caine
PG-13, October 18

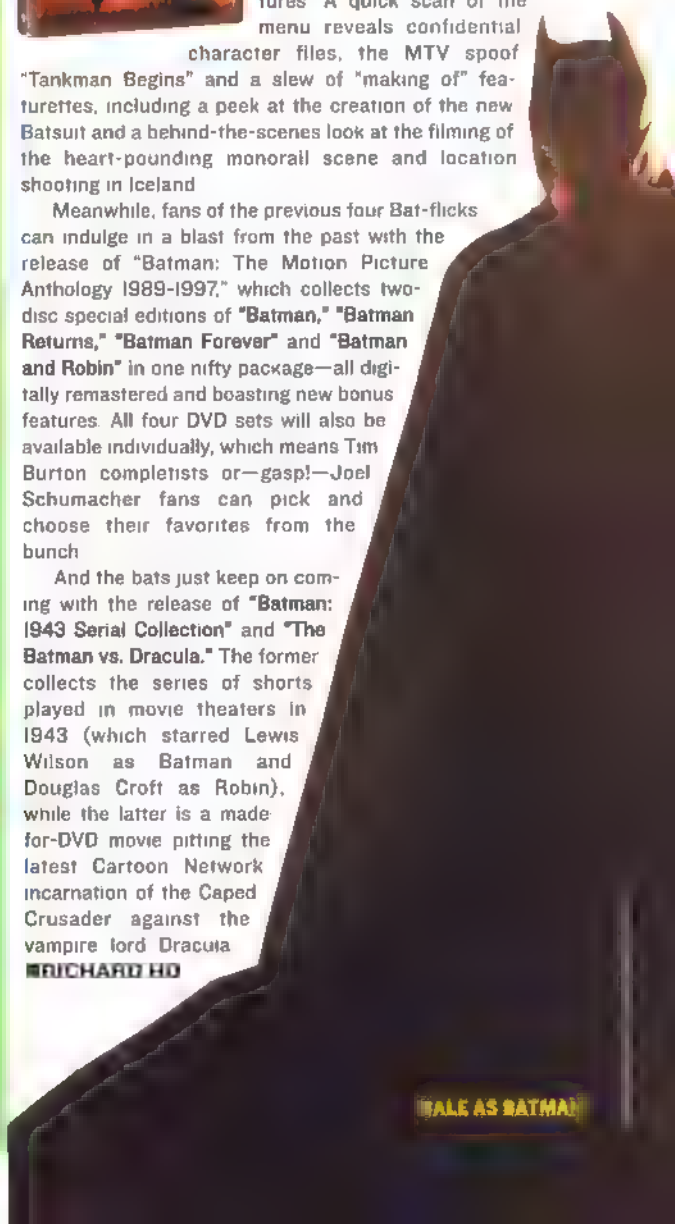
Bats may be nocturnal, but they'll be out in force when the sun rises on October 18. That's when a bundle of Batman DVDs—no less than *seven* individual sets—will flap their way into stores, led by the rabidly anticipated DVD debut of this summer's **"Batman Begins."**

Fans will be able to choose between two versions of the blockbuster movie that revived the Bat-film franchise—a standard edition and a two-disc deluxe edition bursting with special bonus features. A quick scan of the menu reveals confidential character files, the MTV spoof "Tankman Begins" and a slew of "making of" featurettes, including a peek at the creation of the new Batsuit and a behind-the-scenes look at the filming of the heart-pounding monorail scene and location shooting in Iceland.

Meanwhile, fans of the previous four Bat-flicks can indulge in a blast from the past with the release of "Batman: The Motion Picture Anthology 1989-1997," which collects two-disc special editions of **"Batman," "Batman Returns," "Batman Forever"** and **"Batman and Robin"** in one nifty package—all digitally remastered and boasting new bonus features. All four DVD sets will also be available individually, which means Tim Burton completists or—gasp!—Joel Schumacher fans can pick and choose their favorites from the bunch.

And the bats just keep on coming with the release of **"Batman: 1943 Serial Collection"** and **"The Batman vs. Dracula."** The former collects the series of shorts played in movie theaters in 1943 (which starred Lewis Wilson as Batman and Douglas Croft as Robin), while the latter is a made-for-DVD movie pitting the latest Cartoon Network incarnation of the Caped Crusader against the vampire lord Dracula.

■ RICHARD HO



EIGHT-LEGGED TREAT

'Ultimate Spider-Man' will have gamers swinging from the rooftops

Admit it. You've always wanted to be Spider-Man. Well, thanks to Brian Michael Bendis, Mark Bagley and the fine folks at Activision, now you can.

When the *Ultimate Spider-Man* video game swings into stores in October, fans will step right into young Peter Parker's booties and find themselves caught in the web of Bendis and Bagley's four-color world.

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN
Activision
PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PSP, NDS
October

What makes this the *ultimate* comic-based gaming experience? Here are eight reasons why—one for every leg on that darn radioactive spider.

8. IN THE BAG

Who better to design the look and feel of this comic-to-game translation than the guy who draws the comic for a living? Penciler extraordinaire Mark Bagley contributed character designs and storyboard panels that ensure every second of gameplay looks as if it's been lifted straight from the pages of *Ultimate Spider-Man*. Throw in a new graphics process called "3-D comic inking" that goes leaps and bounds beyond standard cel-shading, and you've got a unique and dynamic visual style that jumps right off the screen.

ALONG CAME A SPIDER... Continuing the trend of web-tacular Spider-Man video games, this "Ultimate" version may be just that.

SPIDEY IN HEAT Looks like Ultimate Spider-Man has the hots for the Human Torch.

7. BEND IT LIKE BENDIS

The fan-favorite scribe went to the fountain of youth to give Peter Parker a fresh new voice. Wisely choosing not to mess with a winning formula, Activision hired Bendis to pen the game's script, which picks up threads left over from the comics' Venom story arc. With Bendis controlling the words coming out of the various characters' mouths, expect plenty of patented Peter Parker banter and quips to keep the funny flowing—especially during those heated supervillain battles!

6. PANEL-TO-PANEL

You want panels? We've got panels! *Ultimate Spider-Man* utilizes a truly innovative storytelling format that takes full advantage of its comic origins. Animated panels keep the storyline moving along during the entertaining cut scenes, and they also stop Spidey mid-swing during actual in-game action to provide players with crucial information or alert them about sudden developments! With so many panels popping up across your screen, you'll truly get the feeling that you're reading a comic—without having to turn those pesky pages.

5. A TASTE OF VENOM

Move over Pete! Gamers with a true mean streak will be able to unleash their aggressive tendencies—as well as that slimy tongue—by rampaging around town as Eddie Brock for half the game's stages! The black costume symbiote provides Venom with more car-tossing, building-smashing brute strength than Spidey, along with the ability to shoot tendrils and suck the life energies from innocent bystanders to recharge the suit. And as players progress through the game, the parallel stories of Spidey and Venom eventually intersect—and you can bet the webs will fly when they do!

4. ON PATROL

'Course, saving folks can be just as much fun as scaring the bejeezus out of them. As good ol' Spidey, players get to take advantage of the free-roaming gameplay, which allows them to walk—or more accurately, swing—the streets, looking for random criminals to stop and pedestrians to save. It's like *Grand Theft Auto*—only you're driving a superhero, not a Cadillac.

3. NEW YORK, NEW YORK

It's the city that never sleeps—and the game designers didn't catch a wink as they feverishly added Queens and Brooklyn to the detailed map of Manhattan from Activision's "Spider-Man 2!" Take a little detour to the boroughs to check out Peter's high school, or get a nice helping of home sweet home by stopping by Aunt May's house. You won't even need change for the subway...

CARNAGE VS. VENOM

2. KILLER CAMEOS

Feeling a little star struck? You should! *Ultimate Spider-Man* boasts the largest library of character cameos ever seen in a comic-based video game. **[See sidebar for the exclusive announcement of two new cameos!]** We're talking dozens of familiar faces from the Ultimate Universe, from Nick Fury to Wolverine, all popping up in unexpected places throughout the game to give fanboys an extra little thrill. And it's these little nods that help make the game such a rewarding thrill to play.

1. KNOW YOUR ROGUES

Spidey's always had a knack for attracting the crazies. So no Spider-Man video game would be complete without a full complement of supervillains you love to hate, straight from the greatest rogues gallery in comics. So you know what that means? Players will get to go toe-to-toe with old friends like the Rhino, Electro, Green Goblin—and yes, eventually Venom!

■ RICHARD HO

STARGAZING

EXCLUSIVE! Two 'USM' cameos revealed!

Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer. That's the strategy Activision and writer Brian Michael Bendis followed while stockpiling *Ultimate Spider-Man* with more eye-popping cameos by Ultimate heroes and villains than you can shake a Nick Fury sonic blaster at.

Read on for the exclusive unveiling of two such killer cameos, along with one kick-ass boss battle that'll have you going...well, berserk!

CARNAGE

Why have one crazed symbiotic supervillain, when you can have two?

"When you see him, it's one of those things where you're already seen 25 cool things while playing the game, and you think you've seen everything you're going to see," said Bendis. "And then all of a sudden, you go, 'Holy sh--! It's Carnage!' As people know, Venom is front and center in this game. The plot deals with the ongoing genetic nightmare that is the symbiote suit, which gives birth to Venom and also what ends up being Carnage."

And when players finally encounter the tendril-waving horror in the game, expect him to put up a fight. "He's one of the main bosses that you're going to have to defeat—and it ain't easy!" laughed Bendis.

JOHNNY STORM

Who better to help Spidey let off some steam than his buddy Johnny Storm—a.k.a. the Fantastic Four's resident hothead, the Human Torch!

"Johnny shows up in inappropriate places in Spidey's life," said Bendis. "It's very much in keeping with the fun relationship the two characters have in both the regular and Ultimate Marvel universes. The dialogue was a lot of fun to write—a *lot* of trash-talking."

Johnny's appearances kick off rollicking side races that allow players to fly through the streets at super-speeds. "Johnny's bored, so he challenges Spidey to race him," said Bendis. "The races will take you all over the city, from Dr. Strange's house to the Baxter Building. If you win, you unlock a whole portion of the game. It's tons of fun—but it's hard. And by that I mean *I* couldn't do it!"

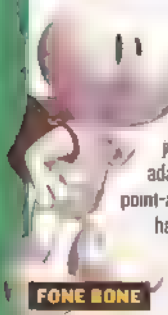
VENOM VS. WOLVERINE

That's right—during one of the stages where you play as Venom, the Ultimate X-Men's most badass member shows up with adamantium claws slashing!

"That boss fight is so freaking kick-ass," raved Bendis. "It's great! You're playing as Venom, and you're fighting Wolverine. It's just a killer geek orgasm." ■ RH

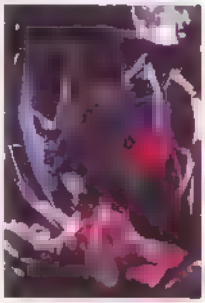
VIDEOGAME RUMBLINGS

Cool games we can't wait to get our paws on this month...



BONE: OUT FROM BONEVILLE (Telltale; PC) If you're one of the many gamers who's mourned the apparent passing of adventure gaming, wipe those tears away because *Bone* might just be the title that revitalizes the genre. *Out from Boneville* adapts Jeff Smith's first *Bone* collection into a fun, all-ages, point-and-click-style, exploratory romp. Traverse the desert, haggle with Phoney, meet the Red Dragon and more, all in fully animated 3-D, complete with tons of straight-from-the-comic voice-acted dialogue. With any luck, Telltale will complete the *Bone* saga with eight more episodes.

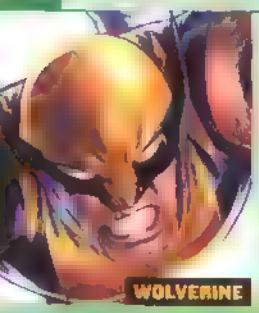
CITY OF VILLAINS (NC Soft; PC) In November, *Villains* is set to deliver a serious blow to the forces of good, while allowing you to indulge in your sinister fantasies and really put the screws (or spikes, chains and talons) to those do-gooder capes. Not only are there new (and evil) costume options as well as lairs, players can take on one of five villainous archetypes that are vastly different from their heroic nemeses. Heroes will face off against ninja-like stalkers (capable of stealth and vicious surprise attacks) and masterminds who, with the power of necromancy or robotics, can rally mechanical minions or legions of undead to do their bidding.



SLY 3: HONOR AMONG THIEVES (Sony; PS2) Once a thief, always a thief—and for fans of Sly Cooper, that's definitely a good thing! The masked raccoon returns along with partners-in-crime Murray and Bentley in a brand-new installment of the smash-hit platforming franchise. This time around, the comic book-inspired visuals are amped up to the next level, with a combination of cel-shading and—for the first time ever!—3-D graphics that add a whole new dimension of depth to the hyper-detailed environments. And yes, glasses are included! ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTH

MARVEL MMORPG



Not to be outdone by DC's announcement of the development of a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game with Sony Online Entertainment (for use on the PS3 and PCs), Marvel has signed with Microsoft to develop an online game that will include the publisher's stable of 5,000+ characters, especially that mean-looking guy at left. The game, expected in 2008, will be available to play on the Xbox 360 as well as PCs. This deal replaces an initial agreement Marvel had with Vivendi Universal. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

VIDEO GAME MARVEL

'Nemesis' will satisfy Marvel zombies

Electronic Arts' gaming goodness has been combined with Marvel's beloved characters in *Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects*, offering a virtual pop-culture piñata filled with bone-breaking heroes, vile villains and a cool comics-inspired story written by Greg Pak (*Phoenix—Endsong*). Featuring a traditional fighting game versus mode, as well as a super-sized single-player campaign, *Marvel Nemesis* will allow gamers to unleash their inner superhero in a flurry of button-mashing mayhem

MARVEL NEMESIS: RISE OF THE IMPERFECTS

Electronic Arts

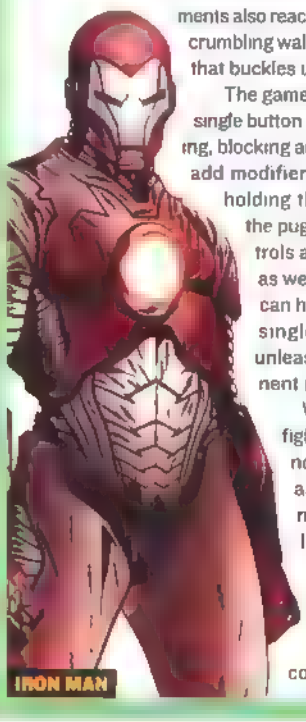
PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PSP, NDS

October

Ten Marvel icons from Spider-Man to Elektra join the fighting fray alongside eight, newly created Imperfects—currently featured in their own comic series. These new antiheroes, as well as Marvel's fan favorites, translate terrifically, as their animations, skills and personalities stick to their comic counterparts. Spidey spins his trademark webs, Wolverine slices and dices and the Thing tosses cars with ease. Speaking of throwing vehicles, *Marvel Nemesis* really shines when players enlist the environment to do their badass bidding. Mailboxes, furniture and exploding barrels are just a few of the items you'll use to strike that finishing blow. The realistic environments also react to all the comic book chaos with crumbling walls, shattering glass and concrete that buckles under the weight of Ben Grimm.

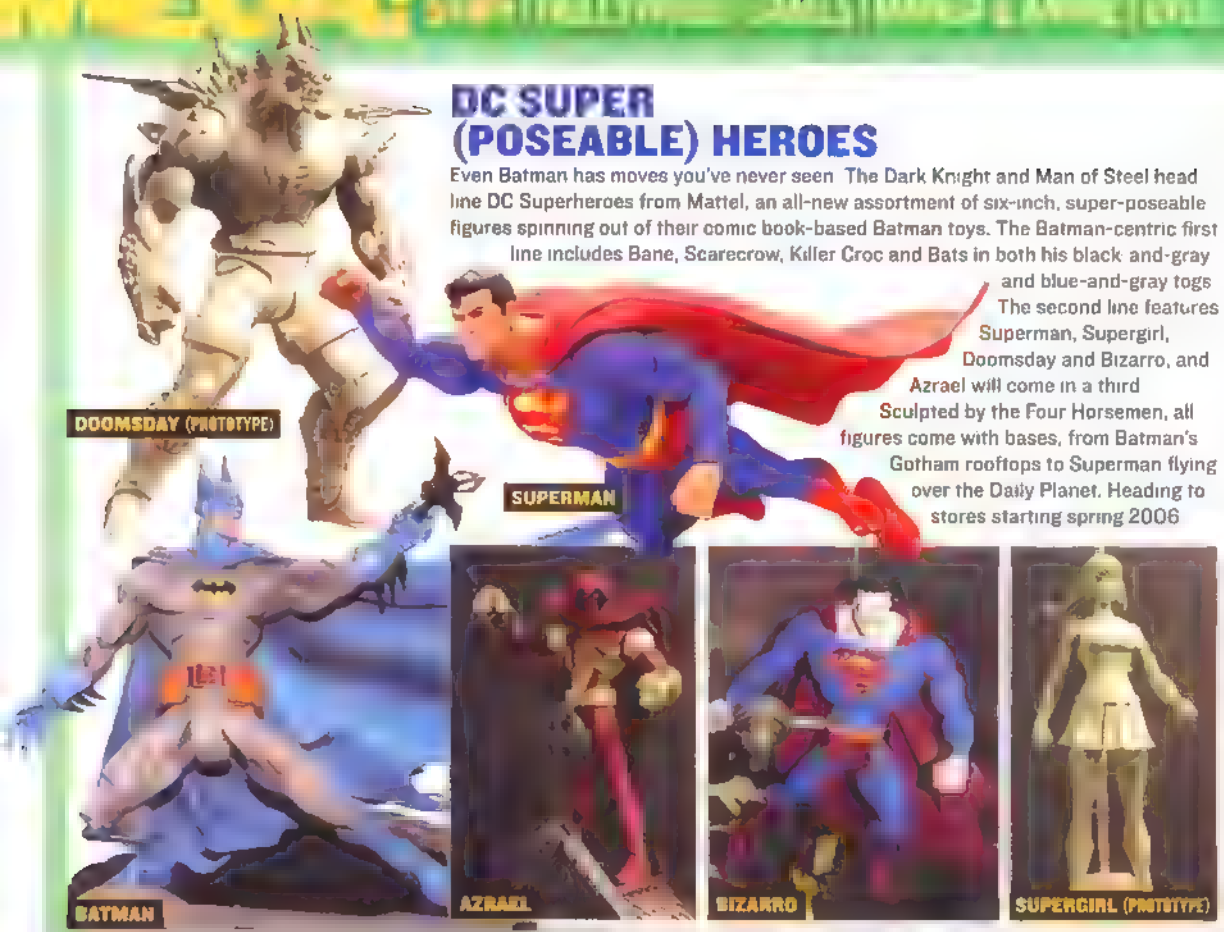
The gameplay is simple, yet satisfying as single button pushes execute attacking, jumping, blocking and throwing moves. Players can add modifiers to all these basic moves by holding the trigger buttons, amping up the pugilistic play. The accessible controls are identical in the versus mode as well as the story mode, so players can hone their superhero skills in the single-player campaign and then unleash heroic hell against an opponent in versus play.

Whether you're a comic fan or fighting fiend, *Marvel Nemesis* will not disappoint with its cool visuals, manageable play and slick narrative. Delve deep into the level-progressing story or revel in the instantly gratifying versus mode. Either way, *Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects* should answer the cape and cowl call ■ MATT CABRAL



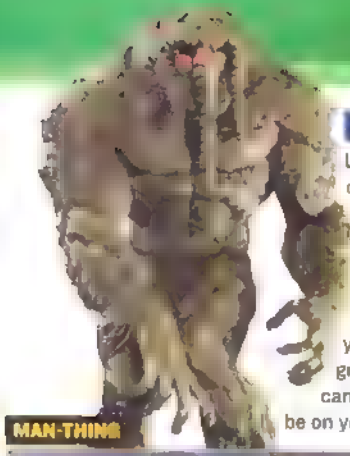
DC SUPER (POSEABLE) HEROES

Even Batman has moves you've never seen. The Dark Knight and Man of Steel head line DC Superheroes from Mattel, an all-new assortment of six-inch, super-poseable figures spinning out of their comic book-based Batman toys. The Batman-centric first line includes Bane, Scarecrow, Killer Croc and Bats in both his black-and-gray and blue-and-gray togs. The second line features Superman, Supergirl, Doomsday and Bizarro, and Azrael will come in a third. Sculpted by the Four Horsemen, all figures come with bases, from Batman's Gotham rooftops to Superman flying over the Daily Planet. Heading to stores starting spring 2006.



EVERYTHING A COMIC FAN COULD WANT

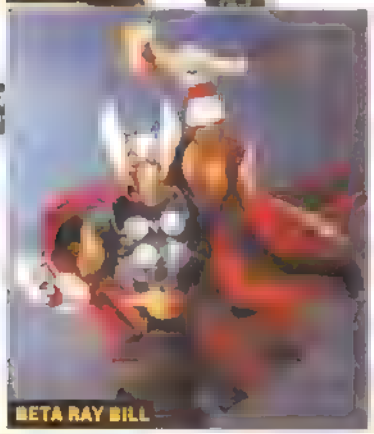
For the man who has everything, get him what he doesn't have—all-new "Justice League Unlimited" figures. Mattel unleashes an army of heroes and villains never seen in figure form, from the female Dr. Light to Vixen to Waverider and the Justice Lords. Plus Superman from the episode "For the Man Who Has Everything" (based on the classic Alan Moore story) gets his very own figure, something he didn't have before. Also look for Luthor in his green and purple suit, Mirror Master, Black Canary and a variety of Green Lanterns including Tomar-Re, all worth giving and/or keeping for your selfish self.



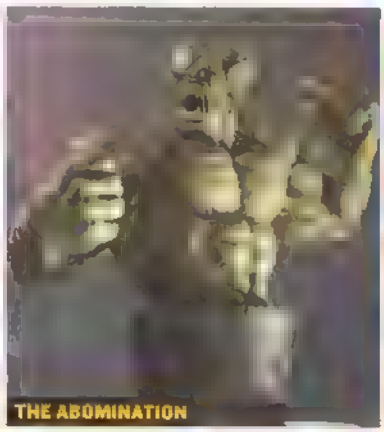
MAN-THING

BUSTED MUGS

Ugly mug month begins in November and to celebrate, Bowen Designs will release three gorgeous busts of Marvel's scariest-looking creatures. Marvel's ripest movie star, Man-Thing, joins the green-scaled Abomination along with the horse-faced alien, Beta Ray Bill. And why should looks matter? When you're as powerful as Thor, or the Hulk's greatest enemy or a walking plant, nothing can faze you. That's why these guys deserve to be on your mantle. Because they're so beautiful



BETA RAY BILL



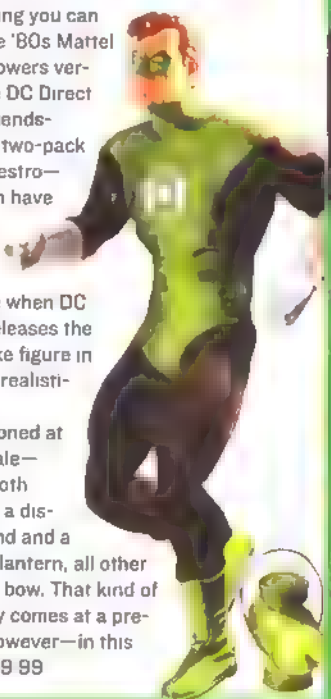
THE ABOMINATION

MARVEL OR BUST

The leaders of the X-Men and the Avengers jump ship, when Diamond Select releases busts of Cyclops and Captain America solo this December. Cyclops sports his *Astonishing X-Men* uniform inspired by the art of superstar artist John Cassaday, limited to 2,500 pieces. A square-jawed, clench-lipped Captain America, limited to 4,000 pieces, looks mighty stylized filling out his solid, 6 1/2" frame

HOW GREEN WAS MY LANTERN

Toy collectors in possession of an array of Hal Jordan figures—the Green Lantern Corps version with a plastic ring you can wear, the '80s Mattel Super Powers version, the DC Direct SuperFriends-inspired two-pack with Sinestro—can soon have one to call the leader. Because when DC Direct releases the 13" deluxe figure in March—realistically proportioned at 1/6th scale—with a cloth uniform, a display stand and a light-up lantern, all other Hals will bow. That kind of authority comes at a premium, however—in this case, $59.99



BOWEN DESIGNS
CLASSIC WOLVERINE BUST

ALEX ROSS ASSEMBLE!

Free up some wall space—the painter's original Avengers Vs. card system art becomes a framed litho in the Upper Deck Fine Art Collection

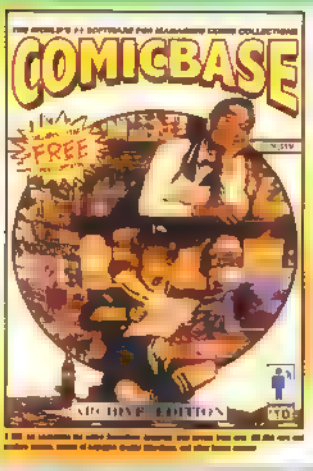
Comic readers are intimately familiar with the formidable power of the Avengers—so when Earth's Mightiest Heroes made their debut in the *Vs.* trading card system last August, Upper Deck pulled out all the stops, bringing in superstar painter Alex Ross to provide art.

"I wanted to show how much I know and love these characters," says Ross. "Anybody who loves these classic heroes could recognize a number of classic body poses I used. Particularly Spider-Man, which is a clear John Romita recreation."

The work is immortalized in a Fine Art Collection litho in November, and Spider-Man is just one of the New Avengers who appear along with Wolverine, Spider-Woman and all-time classics like Captain America, Iron Man and the Hulk.

"In many ways, I've never gotten enough chances to do images of the Hulk," says the artist. "I've always wanted to pay homage to the painted magazine covers from the '70s, where he has this ripped body, but also put in the context of the curvy body shape."

So hang it on your wall, gaze at it, even slobber over it if you like. Feast your hungry, hungry eyes!



COLLECT IN STYLE

Throw your unwieldy comic collection away! That is to say, get rid of the hassle. Keep track of your books easily and efficiently with ComicBase 10, a digital database loaded with info on a whopping 250,000 issues of over 20,000 titles. What's more, it updates itself automatically every week with new releases (update subscription is free for one year) and features PDA tools, so you can take your collection info with you to cons! A standard edition retails for $149, while the Archive Edition, which packs over 100,000 cover images, video interviews with creators and extra database content like CGC census data and record sale prices, runs to $299. Both are in stores now or online at **www.comicbase.com**

CONTINUITY-FREE PLAYTIME

Rolling out more of their Elseworlds lineup, DC Direct gives us another installment of figures based on *Superman: Red Son* in summer of 2006, namely, issue #2's slightly older, more stately Superman in a dressier uniform and the hat-wearing, bomb-in-the-gut Soviet Batman who nearly took him out. The 19th century's Batman is depicted tracking Jack the Ripper in *Gotham by Gaslight*, also hits then, as well as two long-in-coming additions to the Kingdom Come line: Jade and the Spectre.

SWEET FIGHTERS

What do you get when you mix a sack of sugar and very articulated plastic? Adorably awesome Street Fighter Minimates, of course! Even M. Bison would melt your heart. The geniuses over at Art Asylum and Diamond Select Toys can do us no wrong, and seriously, the cute factor is off the charts! Uh, we mean, the ass kicking factor. Two-packs carry Ryu with Akuma, Chun Li with M. Bison, *Darkstalkers'* Demitri with Morrigan or a chase figure of Lilith. Each figure comes with attachments for their fighting combos and will be available in December.

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ASSEMBLING VOLTRON

Beloved '80s cartoon blasts off for rendezvous with silver screen

After conquering the imaginations of an entire generation, the Voltron Force heads for some uncharted territory: Hollywood.

Originally launched in 1984, "Voltron: Protector of the Universe" is currently being developed as a big budget, live-action film by New Line Cinema's Ford Oelman and Mark Costa. The duo snapped up the rights for the cult-favorite animated series from World Events and pitched the concept to producer Mark Gordon ("Saving Private Ryan") and musician/producer Pharrell Williams, who will compose the score and produce the soundtrack.

For Oelman and Costa, the journey from TV to silver screen will truly be a labor of love. "We've always been part of the animation generation," said Oelman. "We grew up on shows like 'Transformers,' 'Thundercats' and 'G.I. Joe,' and there's a strong sense of nostalgia for these shows as we get older. As fans, we wondered why there wasn't a Voltron film in development—so we decided to do something about it."

The original series followed the spacefaring adventures of five pilots who journey to the planet Arus to command the robotic lions that make up the fighting machine known as Voltron—all in an effort to save the universe from the dreaded Drule Empire. The Lion-Force Voltron was later followed by a new incarnation called the Vehicle-Force Voltron, but the producers don't plan to deviate from the first version—yet.

"We very much see this property as a film franchise with multiple installments," said Oelman. "Like a comic book adaptation, we want to start with the origin story and target the core fan audience, which for the majority of Voltron fans is the Lion-Force. Ideally, we'd love to use the other incarnations of Voltron in subsequent films."

The cast of characters will feature all the familiar faces from the show, including Lion-Force members Keith, Lance, Sven, Hunk and Pidge, as well as Princess Allura, Coran, King Zarkon, Prince Lotor and the witch Haggar.

The trio of Oelman, Costa and Gordon is currently meeting with writers and potential directors, and plan to shop the best treatment around to various studios. "And let me tell you right now—we're hearing some fantastic ideas that fans are going to love," raved Oelman. "Voltron is a fantasy adventure about mankind's struggle for survival against a massive alien threat. The core theme of the film will come straight from the series: It is only through unity that one can conquer menace. The good thing is there's lots of Voltron fans in Hollywood, so we're sure to find someone that can do it justice."

The producers also plan to do Voltron justice when it comes to the visual effects, which Oelman confirms will be a combination of CGI and physical techniques. "We anticipate using some CGI for the science fiction elements, but for the most part we want to bring a larger-than-life, realistic Voltron to the big screen," said Oelman. "It's important to utilize every possible technology when making a movie of this scope to ensure the creation of a believable world. For larger mecha battles, it can be a good idea to use scale models. I think Weta [Workshop] was amazingly successful with 'The Lord of the Rings,' using CGI and scaling techniques as well as intricate makeup and costumes."

JUMBOLTRON Lion-Force Voltron, king of the robot jungle, is in film pre-production!

The popularity of the various animated series has already proven that Voltron has staying power—and the producers hope that longevity will carry over into the world of movies. "The fact that it's still airing in some territories 21 years after its conception is a testament to its durability," said Oelman. "The film franchise should have the same kind of resonance. We intend to make the first film a success so that we get to do it again and again." ■ **MATT HIMES AND RICHARD HO**

ANIME BUZZBOX

A NEW HOPE...?

"Star Wars" creator/director George Lucas recently set up a 3-D animation facility in Singapore in an effort to produce TV shows more cheaply than the rest of the industry. "I also look at this as a way to get my foot into an me," he's quoted saying in a CNN article

TOTORO TO THE STARS

The crew of the NASA Space Shuttle *Discovery* woke on the morning of July 29th to the theme music of Studio Ghibli's "My Neighbor Totoro." The song, "Sanpo" (Walk), was played for astronaut Soichi Noguchi in preparation for his space walk that morning.

SUMMER LOVIN'

Rumiko Takahashi's (creator of "InuYasha" and "Ranma 1/2") anime series "Urusei Yatsura" is heading to the Nintendo DS on October 20th. *Urusei Yatsura. Endless Summer* will be sold only in Japan for 5,400 yen, and was developed by Marvelous who also created the popular *Harvest Moon* video game series.

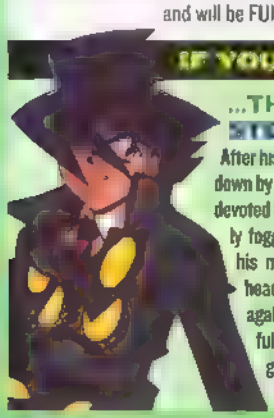
YU-GI-OH REDUX

"Yu-Gi-Oh! GX" will premiere on Cartoon Network in October, 4Kids Entertainment recently announced. The series, which takes place a generation after the original "Yu-Gi-Oh!", will feature a "new, brighter" look meant to attract a younger audience while keeping its current fans.

BROLY FOLLY

FUNimation Productions is set to release the 11th "Dragon Ball Z" movie in October on DVD and UMD. The movie, entitled "Bio Broly," will feature Goku's Saiyan nemesis from two previous movies, Broly, and will be FUNimation's first UMD release.

IF YOU LIKE...BATMAN



...THEN CHECK OUT STEAM DETECTIVES

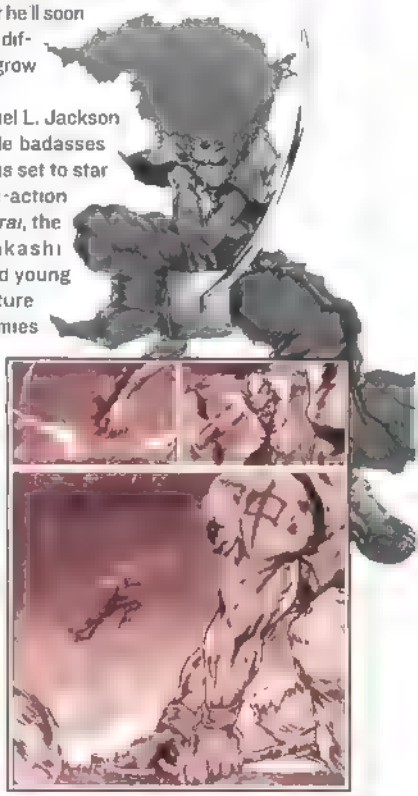
After his wealthy parents were brutally gunned down by a masked supervillain, young Narutaki devoted his life to fighting crime in the eternally foggy metropolis, Steam City. Converting his mansion into a detective's office and headquarters, Narutaki's aided in his quest against injustice by his friends—his faithful butler, the nurse Ling-Ling, and the giant robot Goriki—and an arsenal of ingenious gadgets and weapons!

TO AND 'FRO

'Afro Samurai' produced and played by badass Jackson

Mace Windu may be skilled with a lightsaber in the "Star Wars" prequels, but he'll soon have to learn to handle a different kind of sword and grow some hair. *Lots* of it.

Acclaimed actor Samuel L. Jackson who's played innumerable badasses besides the Jedi master, is set to star in and co-produce a live-action adaptation of *Afro Samurai*, the popular manga by Takashi Okazaki. Afro, a hardened young samurai in the distant future must face powerful enemies as he hunts down a man, rumored to be unbeatable, who killed his father.



Before the live-action adaptation debuts in 2007 however, fans can look forward to hearing Jackson lend his voice to the anime version. Comprising only five episodes from studio powerhouse Gonzo, the series will premiere on Spike TV in 2006.

■ MIGUEL A.L. ESQUIVEL

MANGA MIKE

If there are two things *Wizard* Senior Staff Writer and hero to millions Mike Cotton can't see the appeal of, they're manga and hair. So what were we to do when L'Oréal released Manga Head, one of their line of Garnier Fructis hair products (only available abroad), marrying the two popular hobbies? Simple—we tried it out on him! Check out the results:

ANIME 101

HELLSING

The creatures of the night now have much more to fear than Hugh Jackman. In Geneon's *Hellsing* set in the future, a legendary vampire known as Alucard has become the servant of the London-based Hellsing organization. Bound to Integra, a descendant of the legendary vampire hunter Van Helsing, Alucard must keep the streets bloodsucker-free. Things get interesting when a mysterious outbreak of artificially created monsters begins to pop up, and it's up to Alucard and his double-fisted guns forged from holy artifacts to find out who's behind it. Along the way, he picks up a partner in former Special Forces agent Seras, after turning her into a vampire to save her life.

■ JOE STRAATMANN

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Picks

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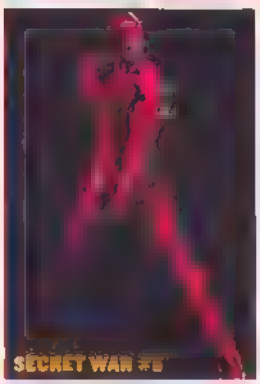

SECRET WAR #5

SECRET WAR MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL The secret's finally out! Brian Michael Bendis and Gabriele Dell'Otto's stunning mini-series comes to an explosive end, 20 months after issue #1 first hit the stands. "I know, I know, you were probably expecting to see this as the spotlight book in the October *2004* issue," laughs Bendis. "But remember, the last issues of *Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen* AND *Camelot 3000* were all late! It's a tradition I never imagined being a part of, but that's how I'm going to rationalize it!"

Of course, the real reason for the book's sporadic shipping schedule was the painstakingly detailed painting process of Italian sensation Dell'Otto. But Marvel firmly believed it was better to ship late than to rush a masterpiece in the making.

"I'll take a lot of blame for that, because you get so excited seeing that kind of art that your instinct as a writer is to make the landscapes and the fight scenes as amazing as you can," admits Bendis. "That's a lot to paint, and it's very difficult. But the art's gorgeous. Gabriele took no shortcuts. He said, 'This is my Marvel book, and I'm going to blow the roof off the place.' You can't fault the guy for that!"

In the meantime, the Marvel Universe kept turning on its axis—which meant Bendis had to pound the keyboard to keep up. "I've rewritten this script so many times, because the entire landscape of the Marvel U. has changed since I started," says Bendis. "I wrote this before I wrote 'Avengers Disassembled.' Between that, *House of M* and what's going on with the X-Men, a lot has changed. But the whole story has been tailored to mesh very nicely with what's going on today, and it's going to connect with a lot of what's coming up."

IN ISSUE #5 (OF 5) *Secret War* forms the bridge between "Avengers Disassembled" and *New Avengers* #1—and while hints of fallout have already been seen in books like *House of M* and *The Pulse*, Bendis promises the final issue tackles plenty of unanswered questions head-on.

"Nick Fury clearly did something bad to the heroes that they don't remember, but you're finally going to see what he did, how he did it and why he did it," says the writer. "Not to mention how the heroes react to finding out they've been screwed over. There's some manipulation going on, and all will be revealed! You'll also meet a new character, and what happens in this issue will lead right into *New Avengers* #14 and what's coming up with Spider-Woman." By Bendis and Dell'Otto.

THE SECRET'S OUT After a long delay, *Secret War* finally concludes, signalling changes for Spider-Man and the New Avengers.

OCT 19 | $2.99 ■ RICHARD HO

ALL STAR BATMAN AND ROBIN, THE BOY WONDER DC

WHY IT'S COOL Seminal Bat-creators Frank Miller and Jim Lee are in the midst of the perfect retelling of how Batman and Robin first partnered up. Only this time, you can count on not hearing Bruce Wayne refer to Dick Grayson as "chum" at any point whatsoever. Hell, 10 minutes after his parents are killed, poor little Dick's already got Bats breathing right in his face and telling him it's time to take care of criminal scum! At least let the kid have a Sunny D or something first.

IN ISSUE #2 You're an orphan who's just been taken in by the richest man in Gotham. What's next? Training! By Miller, Lee and Scott Williams. OCT 26 $2.99

BATMAN DC

WHY IT'S COOL The Red Hood, originally a crappy, forgotten Bat-villain Jason Todd; originally one of the most annoying characters in comics. But put 'em together and you've got one of the most fearsome and fearless bad guys Batman's contended with in years! Jason Todd's not only back in the land of the living, but he looks to have been training the whole time. How else to explain him holding his own in a battle with Bats in issue #641?

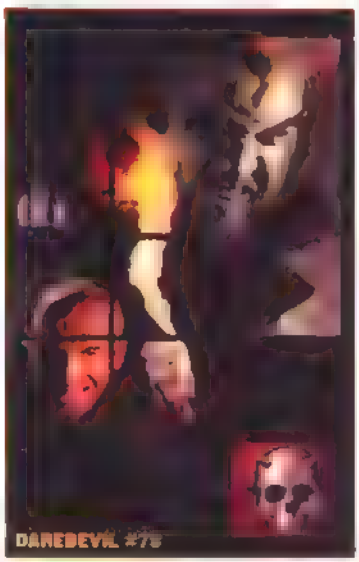
IN ISSUE #646 The Secret Society wants their piece of Gotham, and Deathstroke arrives to lay claim, while Batman contents with the Red Hood's own sinister plans. By Judd Winick, Doug Mahnke and Tom Nguyen. OCT 19 | $2.50

CAPTAIN AMERICA MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL SPOILER ALERT! We all know this golden rule of comics. Bucky stays dead. But writer Ed Brubaker said "Screw that noise," establishing the boy once known as Bucky as the assassin now known as the Winter Soldier! "When people say certain stories are 'forbidden' it makes me think, 'Why?'" says Brubaker. "What if there's a really good story there to tell?" Let's just hope the Winter Soldier's mother isn't Gwen Stacy.

IN ISSUE #12 With the truth about the Winter Soldier revealed, Cap's haunted by his past while dealing with the mad

MR TITLES DENOTED WITH AN MR CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.



General Lukin—who now has the Cosmic Cube. By Brubaker and Steve Epting. OCT 26 | $2.99

CONAN DARK HORSE

WHY IT'S COOL By Crom, Conan makes the life of a bloody, warring barbarian look so glamorous. He lops off heads like he's buttering toast, he wines, he dines and he always gets the girl (or girls). And the guy's got brains to match the brawn: In issue #17, Conan punishes a thief who tried to cheat and then kill him by trailing him ninja-style, one-upping him and then leaving him for the rats in the dirty streets. Like Chuck Berry once said, "Don't come between a man and his money."

IN ISSUE #21 Conan and Taurus, the Prince of Thieves, attack the Elephant Tower, which houses such perils as lions and giant spiders. By Kurt Busiek, Cary Nord and Dave Stewart. OCT 19 | $2.99

IN CONAN AND THE DEMONS OF KHITAI #1 (OF 4) Far in the future, King Conan journeys to the Far East and encounters an evil sorcerer and his cadre of samurai! Can you say "swordfight"? By Akira Yoshida and Paul Lee. OCT | $2.99

DAREDEVIL MARVEL KNIGHTS

WHY IT'S COOL Only in *Daredevil* can an entire issue go by without an appearance from Hornhead—and we don't even mind! The recent "Decalogue" arc showed that Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev can create a compelling tale even when the central superhero only appears in brief flashbacks. And in the story's conclusion in issue #75, the creators truly achieved the impossible: a memorable story involving uber-mort the Jester!

IN ISSUE #76 The countdown to Bendis and Maleev's final issue continues in "The Murdock Papers" Part 3. The Kingpin has evidence of his shady business dealings—and Elektra knows where it is. By Bendis and Maleev. OCT 26 | $2.99

IN DAREDEVIL: FATHER #4 (OF 5) The heat wave continues, as does the killing spree of the mysterious serial killer plaguing Hell's Kitchen. By Joe Quesada, Danny Miki and Richard Isanove. OCT 26 | $2.99

FATHOM ASPEN

WHY IT'S COOL Gorgeous women? Check. Epic fantasy? Double check. You better believe we're hooked like a marlin when it comes to this breath-taking undersea read! *Fathom* shows how much detail can be crammed into each panel, from grand, double-page spreads of fantastic cities to Aspen's striking features. Kudos to Michael Turner for discovering artist Koi Turnbull, a perfect fit for Turner's mighty big shoes.

IN ISSUE #4 Aspen returns to her surface world home only to find her roommate and father missing and the capital city defenseless. By J.T. Krul and Turnbull. OCT | $2.99

GHOST RIDER MARVEL KNIGHTS

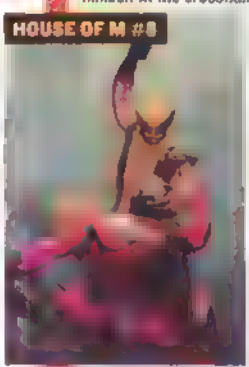
WHY IT'S COOL After returning the Punisher to his ruthless roots, Garth Ennis kick-starts Ghost Rider's way into Knighthood with this mini-series. Rising star Clayton Crain joins the superstar writer for a tale that features the best GR incarnation—the Evel-Knievel-on-speed himself, Johnny Blaze!

'HOUSE OF M' TIE-IN TITLES

EXILES #71 The Exiles' perilous tour of the House of M world comes to a shocking conclusion, as one member of the team comes face to face with a terrifying fate! But which team member? OCT 12 | $2.99

HOUSE OF M #8 (OF 8) When it comes to the Marvel heroes' last-ditch bid to shatter Magneto's imperfect world, the end promises to be explosive! Brian Michael Bendis and Olivier Coipel answer all questions about the House of Magnus in this reality-shattering conclusion... and leave a few more in the process. OCT 26 | $2.99

MUTOPIA X #4 (OF 5) As his daughter stands on the verge of completing the Rite of Mutant Transcendency, Ismael Ortega finds himself in the crosshairs of a terrorist group bent on enacting revenge. OCT 12 | $2.99

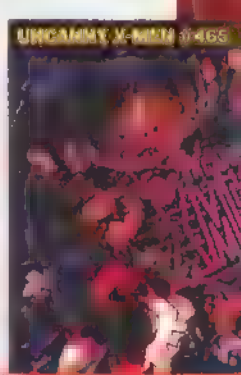


NEW X-MEN #19 Christina Weir, Nunzio DeFilippis and Aaron Lopresti wrap up their four-issue *House of M* tie-in with a no-holds-barred battle between the New X-Mutants and the Hellions! OCT 12 | $2.99

SPIDER-MAN: HOUSE OF M #5 (OF 5) Peter Parker tastes the bitterness of the bottom of the barrel, as the world-famous Spider-Man's disastrous fall from grace leads his loved ones on a city-wide hunt. Mark Waid, Tom Peyer and Salvador Larroca bring the pain! OCT 19 | $2.99

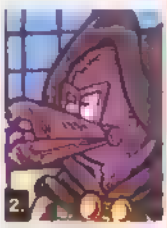
UNCANNY X-MEN #465 Chris Claremont and Chris Bachalo continue their jolly jaunt through the streets of England, where Captain Britain, Nocturne, Juggernaut and company have one last shot to save the Multiverse from the cataclysmic events of *House of M*. OCT 5 | $2.50

WOLVERINE #34-#35 The history lesson by Daniel Way, Javier Saltares and Mark Texeira concludes, as Wolverine's *House of M* past collides with the present in a winner-takes-all showdown with the eye patch-sporting leader of the human resistance movement, Nick Fury! OCT 12 & 26 | $2.50 EACH



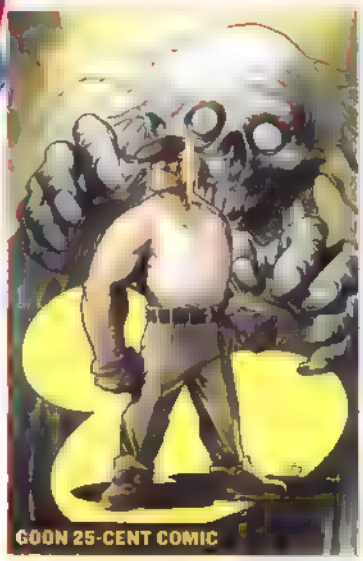
HAM-ILY MATTERS

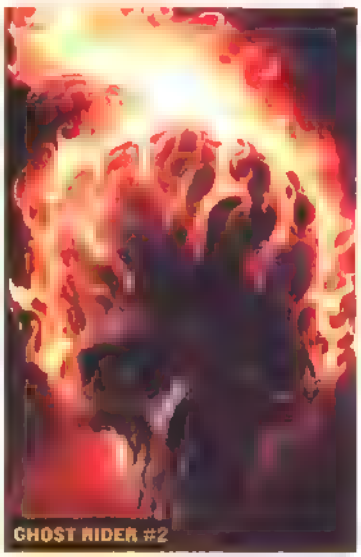
Forget the conclusion to *House of M* and the kick-off of *Infinite Crisis*—October belongs to Peter Porker, baby. The "other white meat" of superheroes bounces back from absolute limbo in an all-new story in the pages of October's *Spider-Man Family One-Shot*. Speaking of spider-families, did you know there was an entire supporting cast of other animal-themed characters in the Spider-Ham U.? Match the headshots of the heroes and villains to their corresponding too-crazy-to-be-made-up monikers below. Unless you're a Muslim.



A. [illegible]
B. Hulk Bunny
C. Crocter Strange
D. Raven the Hunter
E. Captain American
F. [illegible]
G. Iron [illegible]
H. [illegible]

ANSWERS: 1-E, 2-F, 3-C, 4-A, 5-H, 6-B, 7-D, 8-G





IN ISSUE #2 (OF 6) GR continues his bounty hunt for the demon Kazaan who has escaped to Earth, but there's some competition: a redneck demon and a seductive archangel are in on the game as well. By Ennis and Crain. OCT $2.99

GOON 25-CENT COMIC

DARK HORSE

WHY IT'S COOL The fine folks at Dark Horse are rolling out a plethora of gotta-grab Goon goodies this month, including a new hardcover featuring the Goon's origin told chronologically (see p. 120) and this bargain-priced reprint of creator Eric Powell's *The Goon* #1, originally available from Albatross Exploding Funny Books in 2002. Powell's also throwing in all-new back-up story and slapping a new cover on this bad boy, so bust open the piggybank or bug mom for the two bits!
IN THIS ISSUE See how the saga of the Goon began as lots of zombies get the crap beat out of them and Franky makes some wisecracks. Hey, if it ain't broke... By Powell. OCT 12 | $0.25

GREEN LANTERN DC

WHY IT'S COOL After *GL: Rebirth*, we thought writer Geoff Johns would give Hal Jordan—and fans—a bit of a breather. No dice! The first three issues of this all-new ongoing had Hal slugging it out with two generations of Manhunters (the precursors to the Guardians of the Universe), and issue #3 featured the most death-defying ring-recharging we've ever witnessed! Month after month, "Give 'em hell" Hal refuses to let us down.
IN ISSUE #6 The now-mutilated Black Hand returns for revenge after the events of *Rebirth*. Also, a new alien race reveals the secret of their experiments, leading to a mysterious connection with the Rann/Thanagar War. By Johns and Ethan Van Sciver. OCT 26 $2.9 •
IN GREEN LANTERN CORPS: RECHARGE #2 (OF 5) Kyle Rayner finds an old love, while two rookies discover being a GL isn't as simple as just making giant boxing gloves. By Geoff Johns, Dave Gibbons, Patrick Gleason and Christian Alamy. OCT 19 $2.99

HUNTER-KILLER TOP COW

WHY IT'S COOL When you've got Mark Waid and Marc Silvestri as a tag team, comic book conspiracies don't get much bigger than this: It seems someone took control of the U.S. some 40 years ago and no one knows. Now the reality of a superheroes arms race comes to light as it's revealed that the Cuban Missile Crisis actually involved an army of superbeings more powerful than any atomic bomb.
IN ISSUE #8 In this conclusion to the first arc, Ellis discovers who's been running the country and the truth behind the Hunter-Killer program. By Waid, Silvestri and Joe B. Weems V. OCT $2.99

JLA CLASSIFIED DC

WHY IT'S COOL Warren Ellis brings his unique perspective to the Justice League for a dark, suspense-filled mystery that kicked off with issue #10. Twenty suicides at LexCorp have called the attention of Lois Lane and Clark Kent. While Batman spearheads his own investigation, Wonder Woman feels content on Paradise Island—until the entire floating island explodes in mid-air!
IN ISSUE #13 Demons spill into Earth through the open gateway to Hell even

MR TITLES DENOTED WITH AN MR CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.

as Batman and Flash try to force it closed. Put your backs into it, boys. By Ellis and Butch Guice

JSA CLASSIFIED

WHY IT'S COOL We double-dog dare you to dig up a fanboy who doesn't love Power Girl. She's super-powerful, she doesn't take any crap and sweet sassafras pudding, what a costume! But after years of having her origin become increasingly convoluted (is she Kryptonian? Atlantean?), Geoff Johns and Amanda Conner are uncovering the truth of just where she comes from—but are still leaving select areas fully covered, dang 'em. **IN ISSUE #4** Power Girl's origin concludes, leading directly into *Infinite Crisis*. Just what does the Psycho-Pirate have to do with all of this? By Johns, Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti. OCT 19

JUSTICE

WHY IT'S COOL After years of tiding fans over with striking covers for books such as *Space Ghost*, *JSA* and *Superman: Strength*, Alex Ross has returned to painting full-fledged interiors—and he just happens to be tackling the JLA and the Legion of Doom! Painting over the pencils of Doug Braithwaite, Ross has us far beyond pumped to see his renditions of the biggest comic book icons on the planet. Aquaman got the spotlight in issue #1, and he's never looked more cinematic! "Every single member of the JLA goes through a testing and a suffering that they never had before," says co-writer Jim Kreuger. "I come from the belief that the more the heroes suffer, the greater the victory in the end."

IN ISSUE #2 (OF 12) The Riddler takes

COVER ARTIST OF THE MONTH ERIC POWELL

Because you demanded it—the return of Rombuu!

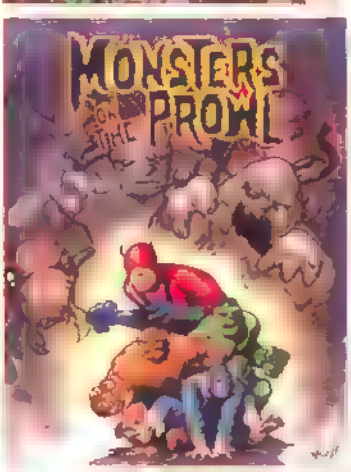
In October, Marvel will release four "Marvel Monsters"-themed one-shots—*Monsters on the Prowl*, *Devil Dinosaur*, *Fin Fang Four* and *Where Monsters Dwell*—all with covers by *The Goon* writer/artist Eric Powell (see below), who also provides the story and pencils for *Devil Dinosaur*.

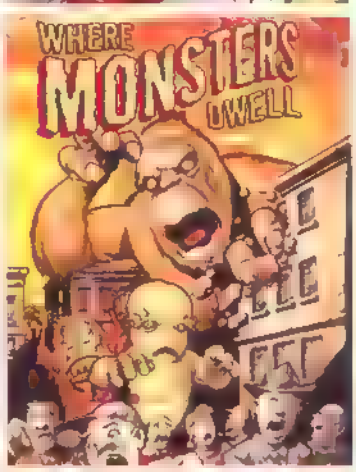
"[Marvel] asked me if I was interested in Devil Dinosaur, and I was like, 'Ah, that would be so great;' I mean, he's a crazy, giant, red tyrannosaur!" Powell enthuses. "I just thought this would be fun because I wouldn't have to draw any buildings, wouldn't have to draw any cars; it would all just be, like, jungle and dinosaurs and cavemen."

The opportunity to provide covers for all four books gave Powell the chance to riff on the classic *Fantastic Four* #1 cover (with *Fin Fang Four*, about a group of four monsters shrunk to human size who now work for the FF), have Devil Dinosaur square off with the Hulk (also seen in the story) and paint a variety of monsters (Rombuu, Droom, Grogg, Goom, etc.) used frequently in Marvel's monster books of the 1950s.

"I didn't know who half of these guys were," Powell admits with a laugh. "Marvel sent me a bunch of links that had photo reference. I think I crammed everybody in there that they asked me to, but they ended up just becoming floating heads. Now guys will come up to me for sketches, and I'll have to be like, 'Which guy was that? The one that looked like a tree?'"

■ JESSE THOMPSON





RATEDMR

BREAK OUT YOUR I.D.!

EX MACHINA #16 (WildStorm/DC) Traveling across America, Mayor Hundred also voyages through his past to rescue a person long left only to his memories. OCT 19 | $2.99

FABLES #42 (Vertigo/DC) Foreign Fables seek refuge in Fabletown, throwing off the homogenous enclave while Prince Charming seeks help from a long-lost friend. OCT 12 | $2.75

LOVELESS #1

LOSERS #29 (Vertigo/DC) Everything has led the Losers here as Max puts his plans in their final stages. The team faces its final battle with the fate of the world riding on their success. OCT 26 | $2.99

LOVELESS #1 (Vertigo/DC) In this post-Civil War era tale, Brian Azzarello introduces Wes Cutter and his wife, on the run from the law and their pasts in the broken South. OCT 26 | $2.99

100 BULLETS #65 (Vertigo/DC) Lono, Loop and Victor join forces to kill the last members of the Trust. OCT 12 | $2.75

POWERS #15 (Marvel/Icon) The passing of the Cosmic Avengers shakes the status quo but doesn't stop Internal Affairs from investigating Deena Pilgrim. OCT 12 | $2.95

PUNISHER #26 (Marvel/MAX) A new vigilante task force gets between the Punisher and his prey. OCT 5 | $2.99

RED SONJA #5 (Dynamite Ent.) Sonja and Osan trek through the tower as the Dark Lord comes ever closer to immortality. OCT | $2.99

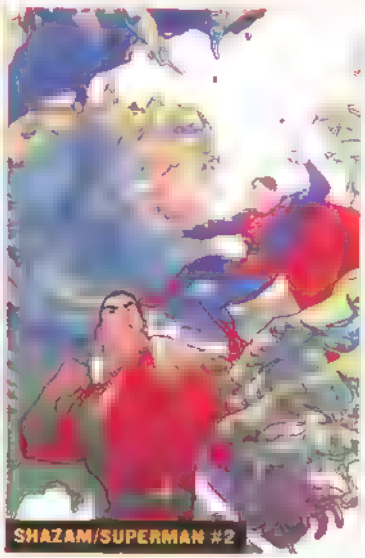
SILENT DRAGON #4 (OF 6) (WildStorm/DC) Reizo visits a legendary cybernetic weapons-maker where he prepares for his assault on the government facility, home to the android army. OCT 26 | $2.99

SUPREME POWER: HYPERION #2 (OF 5) (Marvel/MAX) With his secret out, Hyperion has no one to trust, and four new super-beings plot to take him down. OCT 19 | $2.99

SUPREME POWER: NIGHTHAWK #2 (OF 5) (Marvel/MAX) A serial killer forces Nighthawk to dive into the darkest slums and challenge his own demons. OCT 5 | $2.99

Y: THE LAST MAN #38 (Vertigo/DC) Yorick deals with a persistent reporter eager to expose the story of the century. OCT 5 | $2.99

NEW AVENGERS #12


SHAZAM/SUPERMAN #2

center stage as he leads Batman on a twisted mystery that may explain why the villains want to help humankind. By Krueger, Ross and Braithwaite. OCT 19 | $3.50

NEW AVENGERS MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL Issue #8 proved that there's no "i" in team as Spider-Man, Spider-Woman, Wolverine and Luke Cage had to take down a fresh-outta-the-slammer Wrecker on a suburban street. Sure, they had to take a few lumps, but Rome wasn't built in a day, right? Plus, they all got to learn about Spider-Woman's pheromone-producing power. Saucy!

IN ISSUE #12 With more ninjas than an "I hate Daredevil" convention, Madame Hydra plans to reclaim the Japanese underworld unless the Avengers can plow through the new Hand with the help of their new resident ninja, Ronin. By Brian Michael Bendis and David Finch. OCT 26 | $2.50

SEA OF RED MAGE

WHY IT'S COOL Vampires. Pirates. Vampirates? The *Sea of Red* creative team scores one for originality, and two for setting the story in the present day. In issue #3, slimy film director Joel Cameron leads his underwater crew on a mission of revenge on behalf of his vampirate hostage (an undead, 16th-century Spanish sailor who's been trapped at the bottom of the ocean), hoping to film the whole experience for his own profit—but he winds up letting his entire crew die in a shipwreck. Scorcese wouldn't let that fly!

IN ISSUE #8 Surrounded by death, Janine deals with her own immortality and faces the ultimatum of committing suicide or continuing to live at the expense of other's lives. OCT 26 | $2.99

SHAZAM/SUPERMAN: FIRST THUNDER DC

WHY IT'S COOL The Big Blue Boy Scout and the Big Red Cheese: Both wear capes, have impressive jaw lines and sport dated hairstyles (the spit-curl and the slick-back). When they first met, did they trade fashion tips? Nope, they slugged it out with demons set upon Fawcett City in this flashback tale. "The story is so clean and focused, all I have to do is put the pencil down," says artist Josh Middleton. "Judd [Winick]'s scripts reflect his understanding of the medium. The fact that I haven't felt the need to change much demonstrates how solid this story is."

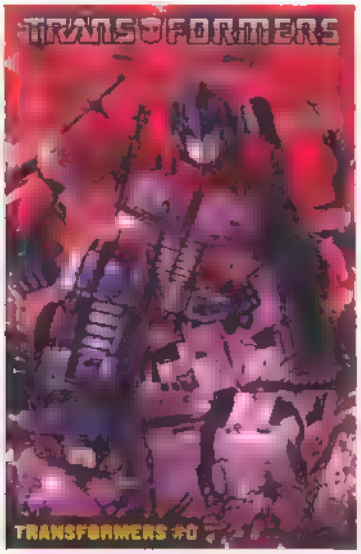
IN ISSUE #2 (OF 4) Superman and Captain Marvel deal with a massive monster attack. By Winick and Middleton. OCT 5 $3.50

TEEN TITANS DC

WHY IT'S COOL It's been a rough couple of months for the Titans; first, there was an attempted Titans massacre by Dr. Light; second, a brainwashed Superboy left the team in shambles; and third, the team was pitted against Kestrel, who aims to break the alliance between Chaos and Order. Now, after a two-month break, writer Geoff Johns returns, and with *Infinite Crisis* craziness in full swing, looks like these kids have another rough couple of months ahead.

IN ISSUE #29 The Red Hood wants what's rightfully his, but Robin seems to be in the way. By Johns, Carlos D'Anda and Marlo Alquiza. OCT 19 $2.50

MR TITLES DENOTED WITH AN MR CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.



THOR: BLOOD OATH

MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL We're all bummed that the God of Thunder has been left without an ongoing series (being dead and all) But with writer Mike Avon Oeming who gave Thor a hell of a send-off in last year's "Ragnarok" storyline, and penciler Scott Kolins, who blew us away with his rendition of a hulking Goldilocks in *Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*, tackling Thor in this flashback tale set on Asgard, you can bet beastly heads will roll!

IN ISSUES #2-#3 (OF 6) The Warriors Three follow Thor on an epic journey, and in #3, Thor battles Hercules—for the entire issue! By Oeming and Kolins. OCT 5 & 19 $2.99 EACH

TRANSFORMERS IDW

WHY IT'S COOL Forget that Dreamwave, the last publisher to tackle the Robots in Disguise, suddenly folded We're talking about giant robots that turn into sports cars, fighter jets and freakin' guns here, people. You can't beat a concept like that with an Energon stick. IDW's already proven they can resuscitate licensed characters with their successful *Angel* mini-series, so let's see the Cybertronian sheen they put on these bad boys!

IN ISSUE #0 Before the new ongoing kicks off in January, see what the creators have in store for the Autobots and Decepticons in this 16-page prequel, with eight more pages of features. By Simon Furman and E.J Su. OCT $0.99

ULTIMATE FANTASTIC FOUR MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL Zombies versus superheroes. Could life get any better? Try zombie Thor zombie Hercules and zombie Hulk! Writer Mark Millar sends Mr Fantastic into an alternative Marvel U. where every superhero has become undead. The fear only builds on the final page of issue #22 when Invisible Woman looks for her Reed—only to find a horrific Zombie Four reaching out to say hi.

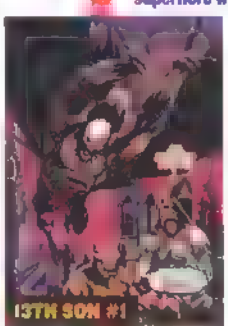
IN ISSUE #24 Ultimate Namor debuts with a fearsome agenda. And what's Atlantis' connection to the Inhumans? By Millar and Greg Land. OCT 19 | $2.50

ULTIMATE SECRET

MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL Three words Gah Lak Tus. And though we've only seen hints of this oncoming monstrosity, we already know this version of the planet eater will be more than three times a destructive force than his predecessor! Good thing Ultimate Earth's heroes have some help in the form of Ultimate Captain Mahr Vell

IN ISSUE #4 (OF 4) The Kree launch an assault on S.H.I.E.L.D. while the Ultimates, FF and Mahr Vell find some useful information: the truth about Gah Lak Tus By Ellis and Tom Raney. OCT 26 | $2.99



ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL With the "Warriors" arc, Brian Michael Bendis is trying to overstimulate our delicate fanboy minds. How else do you explain a storyline that incorporates Ultimate takes on Moon Knight, Iron Fist, Shang-Chi, the Black Cat, Elektra, Hammerhead and Kingpin?

PICKS Q&A

KELLEY JONES

Kelley Jones may have made his bones on superhero books like *Deadman* and *Batman*, but these days he's at the forefront of the horror explosion. The first ish of his latest foray into fear, the creator-owned four-issue mini *The 13th Son: Worse Thing Waiting*, ships this October from Dark Horse. *Wizard* got his take on why horror should be optimistic why Batman should be scary and why monsters should be afraid—very afraid

WIZARD: What's the scoop on *The 13th Son*?

JONES: It's a horror comic, but a little different—it takes place primarily from a monster perspective. The 13th Son himself is like an urban legend to the monsters—what Mothman and Bigfoot and UFOs are to us, he is to them. He's a boogeyman to other monsters, and he kills every one of them he comes across in order to clear the way for his own impending 13th Son

What do you think makes for great horror?

You can't do it just by having a gory shot or nihilistic depressing characters I hate books that are fundamentally pessimistic. If you've got some hope that something good will come out of it, that makes the book more chilling and more atmospheric. If it's just depressing, who cares?

How does it feel to be considered one of the top horror artists in the biz?

It's fine because that's what I set out to do Not so much that, "Oh, people will think of me that way"—just that I love doing them, because I love reading them.

You also put a horror spin on your superhero work.

Well, certainly with *Batman*. I thought his No. 1 thing, before anything else, should be to scare the hell out of people so they wouldn't commit crimes anymore His simple presence would make me stop doing *anything*. I approached it like a horror film.

So what did you make of "Batman Begins"?

It looked like they did a lot of the same things. He was genuinely a terrifying character, and they handled him that way—just him standing there was upsetting, you know? [*Laughs*] I always thought that Batman had to look cool and impressive all the time and they seemed to do that more than anything else I've seen. The bravest criminals are the ones who actually pull out the gun and shoot at him!

■ SEAN T. COLLINS

'INFINITE CRISIS' TIE-IN TITLES

Infinite Crisis #1 smacks the DC Universe around like a little bee-yotch in October, and the story bleeds into these books!

ACTION COMICS #832 The Spectre comes trick-or-treating at Superman's house, and he's not looking for Tootsie Rolls! OCT 12 | $2.50

ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN #645 There's no escape from an OMAC swarm in Metropolis, and no way to stop it. And what's Luthor up to now? OCT 19 | $2.50

AQUAMAN #35 Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, OMACs attack! Start swimmin', Sub Diego citizens. OCT 5 | $2.50

BIRDS OF PREY #87 Oracle vs. Calculator! What weapons will they choose? Pistols at 1,000 paces or deadly instant messaging? OCT 19 | $2.50

BREACH #10 The H.I.V.E. and Kobra bug the hell outta Breach in this *Villains United* tie-in. Call animal control, major! OCT 12 | $2.50

FIRESTORM #18 Everybody wants Firestorm. Unfortunately, it's mostly OMACs and the Secret Six that want him. OCT 5 | $2.50

GREEN ARROW #55 GA and Dr. Light have unfinished business, but not before Mirror Master and Killer Frost throw down with Ollie first. Jeez—take a number, people. OCT 12 | $2.50

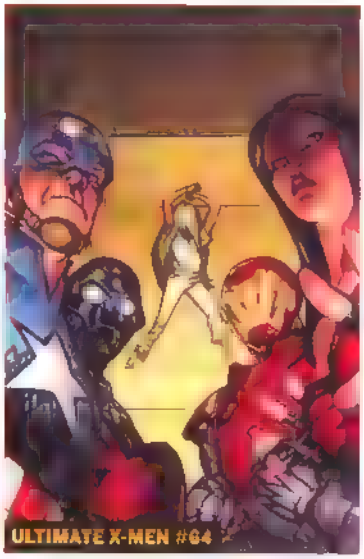
JSA #78 Jakeem Thunder is M.I.A., and the Spectre's still tearing the world asunder in this *Day of Vengeance* tie-in. OCT 5 | $2.50

OUTSIDERS #29 The Fearsome Five are a lot deadlier thanks to all-new powers in this *Day of Vengeance* tie-in. OCT 5 | $2.50

RANN/THANAGAR WAR #6 It's the big finish, and the galaxy's nastiest war leads right into *Infinite Crisis* #1. OCT 5 | $2.50

SUPERMAN #222 Why are the Man of Steel's closest friends scared to death of him? OCT 5 | $2.50

WONDER WOMAN #222 Now that Wonder Woman has Cheetah in her clutches, will she snap her neck or chop off her head? Things get messy in this *Villains United* crossover! OCT 26 | $2.50



IN ISSUE #64 Pity poor Hammerhead—his swanky pad's gonna get crashed when Spidey and friends try to keep Elektra from killing him. By Bendis and Mark Bagley. OCT 5 $2.[illegible]

ULTIMATE X-MEN

MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL Things aren't looking bright for Polaris. After accidentally killing a few police officers with her powers, she's stuck in the only cell that can hold her: Magneto's. And he just happens to be there too. "Magneto is probably one of the 10 best fictional villains ever created in any medium," says writer Brian K. Vaughan. "I'm having an absolute blast writing him in this arc."

IN ISSUE #64 "Magnetic North" continues as warring mutant factions call the attention of the Ultimates. Stuck in the middle? Magneto himself. By Vaughan and Stuart Immonen. OCT 12 | $2.50

VILLAINS UNITED [illegible]

WHY IT'S COOL Catman and Deadshot have become the Power Man and Iron Fist of the supervillain set. Like Luke and Danny, it's an unlikely partnership, but after some initial scuffling, they've gelled into a completely fearsome unit, as evidenced by their teamwork in issue #4. When Catman calls attention to himself in a room full of opposing villains, he does a backflip only to reveal his pal Floyd hiding behind him, ready to unleash a barrage of bullets on a handful of Lex Luthor's Society underlings!

IN ISSUE #6 (OF 6) Mockingbird's identity's revealed, but make you sure you pick up this ish before *Infinite Crisis* #1! By Gail Simone, Dale Eaglesham and Wade von Grawbadger. OCT 12 | $2.50

WALKING DEAD IMAGE

WHY IT'S COOL The perfect zombie movie that never ends, *Walking Dead* actually one-ups its big-screen competition by throwing in character development twists that leave us hungrier for the next issue than a zombie at a fat camp. Take poor Allen in issue #20—he's seen his wife die at the hands of zombies, and he's been practically catatonic since. Just when it seem he's broken out of his funk and is ready to move on, an undead freak slithers out of nowhere and pigs out on his ankle!

IN ISSUE #24 We've been reading about Rick and companions as they cope with a land of the dead for two years now, but it looks like Rick's finally gone over the edge. By Robert Kirkman, Charlie Adlard and Cliff Rathburn. OCT 12 $2.99

YOUNG AVENGERS

MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL Proving that getting ripped in half by a psycho She-Hulk can't keep a good android down, the Vision's back! Looks like he'll be playing the role of mentor to the team, and his first order of business should be to commend Iron Lad for his excellent use of literal backstabbing. If the kid hadn't run Kang through with that ginormous sword, the fledgling team would be toast!

IN ISSUE #9 Patriot and Asgardian reveal their secret origins, threatening the team's future. By Allan Heinberg and Jim Cheung. OCT 26 $2.99

BookShelf

TRADES, BOOKS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR OCT

SPOTLIGHTON...

YOUNG AVENGERS VOL. I: SIDEKICKS HC

MARVEL

WHY IT'S COOL To channel Skid Row, it's youth gone wild when the aspiring Avengers of Allan Heinberg and Jim Cheung's mega-popular series assemble—this time within the pages of a shiny new hardcover collecting the first six issues of the super-teen sensation!

With Cheung's gorgeous art bringing a new generation of Marvel heroes to life, the debut comic effort of former "O.C." writer Heinberg has won over readers old and young by appealing to the fanboy in all of us. "For me at least, *Young Avengers* was conceived as the ultimate fanboy wish-fulfillment fantasy," says Heinberg. "It's essentially a book about a group of Marvel Comics fanboys who end up becoming superheroes themselves."

The first arc introduced Patriot, Asgardian, Hulking and Iron Lad—a team of rookie superheroes who rush to fill the void left by the disbanding of the Avengers in the wake of "Avengers Disassembled." But the grown-ups take notice, as Captain America, Iron Man and Jessica Jones confront the fledgling team—just as the time-traveling tyrant Kang arrives from the future to force Iron Lad to embrace his villainous destiny.

Needless to say, the heroes grow up in a hurry. "Though they first appear as a group of wannabe Marvel sidekicks," says Heinberg, "over the course of the first six issues, they prove themselves legitimate heroes in their own right."

Meanwhile, the book itself has proven to be a legitimate smash hit, blending non-stop super-powered action sequences with Heinberg's knack for crafting likable—and believable—young characters. "The key is to focus on the characters' emotional lives, no matter how much larger than life the conflicts become," explains Heinberg, who's at his best dealing with witty banter, romantic tension and teen insecurities. "Luckily the characters' voices and attitudes have only become more distinct over time—so it continues to be a huge pleasure discovering what they're going to say or do next."

BOTTOM LINE Looking to party with the hottest kids in the Marvel U.? Look no further than these 144 pages, packed wall-to-wall with super-thrills, superpowers and super-sized teen drama. And leave the keg at home.

A- | OCT 26 | $21.99 ■ RICHARD HO

PATRIOT ACT Judging from our favorite junior Captain America above, expect lots of fist-pumping in the *Young Avengers* hardcover.

ASTRO CITY: LOCAL HEROES DC/WILDSTORM

The stand-alone tales in this collection of writer Kurt Busiek and artists Brent Anderson and Alex Ross' look at superheroes through the eyes of the everyman doesn't quite hit the high notes that the series is capable of, but moments like the introduction of Punisher-meets-Ghost-Rider vigilante the Blue Knight and a look at a rural hero from outside the Astro City limits show that veteran scribe Busiek can still surprise. Collects the five-issue mini and other assorted stories. B- | OCT 12 | $17.99 ■ SEAN T COLLINS

BATMAN: UNDER THE HOOD

Judd Winick touched a nerve and set himself up for career crucifixion when he decided to bring back Jason Todd from the grave. Surprisingly, "Under the Hood" (*Batman* #635-#641) makes for a thrilling read whether you believe Todd is really back or not. And even though he's bad, he ain't drawn that way compliments of Doug Mahnke's gritty Gotham penciling. B- | OCT 26 | $9.99 ■ CHRIS WARD

BATTLE HYMN: FAREWELL TO THE FIRST GOLDEN AGE

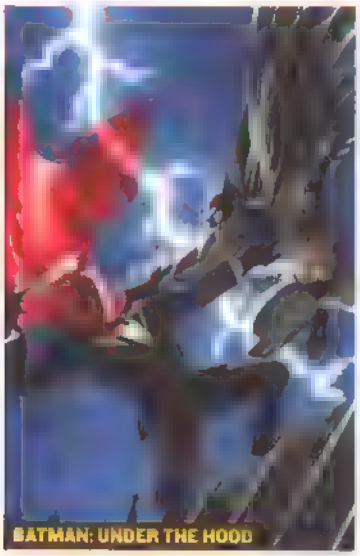
IMAGE

Superhero tales set in the '40s have typically been a reflection of that era: simple, wholesome and fun. Ever wonder if the Golden Age really wasn't so pristine after all? B. Clay Moore and Jeremy Haun take a handful of familiar concepts and archetypal characters and dirty 'em up a bit. From mentally unstable symbols of the American Way, to horny fish-men, to world-conquering conspiracies, *Battle Hymn* is a grim, yet gripping tale for the ages. Collects issues #1-#5. B | OCT 19 | $14.99 ■ RYAN PENAGOS

CATWOMAN: WHEN IN ROME

Wonderfully sexy to look at and loaded with a story as romantic as it is dangerous, Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale are the cat's meow on this sleek six-part mini. Though more lighthearted compared to the duo's previous works, this one lands on all fours with its witty banter and intense European action. Here's hoping that Loeb writes a lot more "Selina in the bathtub" scenes for Sale to render in future collaborations. B | NOV 2 | $3.99 ■ CW

MR TITLES DENOTED WITH AN MR CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.



CHOSEN DARK HORSE

Known more for bombastic and sometimes wholly irreverent writing, Mark Millar's teaming with artist Peter Gross for the story of a boy who may be the second coming of Christ offers an exceptionally different style and genre for the Scots writer. A story as much about coming of age, young sexuality and father/son relations as it is about Catholic doctrine, the pacing and mood are a little too slow and deliberate, but build to a final two pages that will make even the most hardcore Millar fans—always ready for his usual shock and awe technique—wince.

B OCT 12 $9.95 ■ **MIKE COTTON**

CONAN: THE GOD IN THE BOWL AND OTHER STORIES DARK HORSE

Don't betray Conan! The second collection of Conan's Dark Horse adventures sees the Cimmerian kill a pair of backstabbers, trounce some thieves, slay a demon and take on the malevolent Thoth-Amon for the first time. It makes for an exciting and oft-times gut-wrenching collection, but it's unfortunately hindered by its erratic art. Cary Nord has proven himself to be *the* Conan artist of this generation, but the frequent fill-ins throughout stifle the strength and flow of these tales.

B- OUT NOW | $15.95 ■ **RP**

DAREDEVIL VOL. 12: DECALOGUE MARVEL

The latest collection from Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev's now-legendary *DD* run starts off in a fashion reminiscent of Will Eisner's *Spirit* stories, revealing how Daredevil's year-long stint as the Kingpin of Hell's Kitchen affected the lives of everyday people. But soon an unexpected—and terrifying—connection between these different lives reveals itself, and by the time DD himself shows up, this is one of the most thrilling tales in Bendis and Maleev's entire run—and one of the scariest horror comics of the decade. Collects issues #71-#76

B+ OCT 19 $14.99 ■ **STC**

GREEN LANTERN: REBIRTH HC DC

Less confident writers would have relaunched Hal Jordan by wiping the slate clean of his jumbled Parallax backstory. But Geoff Johns miraculously untangled one of comics' most twisted knots and turned it into a beautiful opus of redemption and willpower made cinematically striking thanks to the razor-sharp pencils of Ethan Van Sciver. It will have a welcome space on any sector of our bookshelf.

A OCT 12 $24.99 ■ **CW**

NYX/X-23 HC MARVEL

Packing in 13 issues of hardcore comics, this 352-page hardcover collects both X-23's mini-series, where she's raised from birth to become a killer, and the first six issues of *NYX*, where she searches along with other street-wise teen mutants for a place to call home that isn't just another Manhattan alley. With gorgeous art by Josh Middleton (*NYX*) and Billy Tan (*X-23*), the stories give fans a complete picture of who X-23 is and where she comes from.

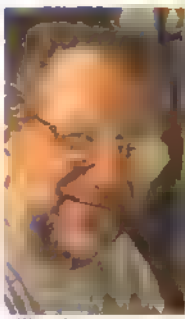
B- OCT 19 $34.99 ■ **PAT McCALLUM**

THE ORIGINALS SC DC/VERTIGO

He's best known for drawing *Watchmen* and writing *Ronn/Thanagar War*, but in this

BOOKSHELF Q&A

JOE KUBERT



It's a good thing comic book legend Joe Kubert picked up pen and ink instead of a life of crime, because judging by his new graphic novel from iBooks, *Jew Gangster*, he would've been one tough made man.

The 139-page tome, out in October, follows Rudy, a poor Jewish boy, as he grows more distant from his family during the Great Depression and closer and closer to a life of crime and murder. *Wizard* sat down with Kubert to talk about where he drew inspiration from, a possible trilogy and his new Sgt. Rock project coming next year.

WIZARD: How much of *Jew Gangster* is based on your life during the Depression?

KUBERT: It's biographical to some degree—not autobiographical, but biographical. It's the time I grew up; it's the time I was living in Brooklyn. I selected the names of the main guys from the friends I grew up with. They were all guys I knew. This was the time Murder Incorporated was running around East New York. I had no idea what was going on at the time except for knowing these were heavy, heavy guys.

Were you ever tempted to become a gangster?

I would imagine so. It was purely a matter of luck. Every one of the guys I know—I was 7, 8, maybe 10 years old—there was very little difference. Who the hell knew what was right, what was wrong, what was good, what was bad except that which was told to you at home by your mother and father?

Without giving away the ending, it does seem there may be more stories to tell from this time...

I'm hoping for this to be a trilogy. This is just the first of this character's stories.

Is there a moral to this tale?

If somebody perceives a moral in the story, that's great. But I'm trying to tell a story as straight and as close to what I feel happened at that time as I possibly could. As far as morals are concerned, I'm just telling a story.

You're also writing and illustrate a Sgt. Rock mini for DC next year.

It'll be six issues. I read a story just prior to the war, a rabbi of a very orthodox sect was going to be secreted out of Europe. I thought that might be the basis for a story I'd like to do. So, Sgt. Rock and Easy Company are commissioned to bring this guy out. I think it's pretty good.

■ **MIKE COTTON**

CRYPT KEEPERS

GRADES FOR OCTOBER-SHIPPING SPOOKY TRADES

DAMN NATION (Dark Horse) It's a great premise: Vampires overrun the United States, and a special ops team must infiltrate the abandoned nation to find a cure. But plot holes (why didn't the virus overwhelm Canada, too?), vaguely defined characters and a waiting-for-the-sequel ending means the finished product lacks bite. **C+** | OCT 12 | $12.95

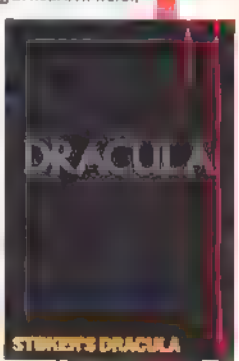
ESSENTIAL WEREWOLF BY NIGHT (Marvel) This black and white collection offers a wicked look at the bulk of Marvel's '70s macabre-lite series—which holds up shockingly well. Filled with freaks like Mad Monk and "Krogg! The Lurker From Beyond!," this howling creature feature provides over-the-top, drive-in movie-style thrills **B (yeah, you heard us...a B)** | OCT 12 | $16.99

THE FOG (Dark Horse) Wrapped under a creepy Mike Mignola cover, this graphic novel prequel to the upcoming "Fog" remake unfolds on a remote island off the edge of America where the inhabitants slowly begin to lose their minds—and the flesh off their bones. A scary treat **B-** OCT 26 | $6.95

THE GOON: FANCY PANTS EDITION HC (Dark Horse) See how the Goon started pummeling zombies from day one! Collecting six standalone issues from Eric Powell's series, this collection serves up the chronological history of the bruiser, along with a sketchbook and never-before-seen story. **B+** OCT 12 | $24.95

LITTLE BOOK OF HORROR: DRACULA (IDW) Steve Niles goes the cute route with this adaptation of the Bram Stoker classic. At best, it's a bedtime story for the young at heart. At worst, it's a humdrum homage. **C** | OCT | $15.99

STOKER'S DRACULA HC (Marvel) Fuzzy scans of the original pencils take away from this adaptation by Roy Thomas and Dick Giordano (originally from the '70s mag *Dracula Lives!* and just recently completed), but the unhurried pace suits the horror **B+** | OCT 12 | $24.99 ■



OUTSIDERS: WANTED

original graphic novel both drawn and written by Dave Gibbons, there's not a superhero in sight. Instead, Gibbons draws on his own teenage years as a Mod (think "Quadrophenia" by the Who) in swinging London by telling a retro-futuristic tale of a sharp-dressed street gang and the war that drives two of its members apart. We never really learn what makes lead character Lel tick, but the beautiful gray-toned art and slick sci-fi setting make for a memorable read. **B-**, OCT 26, $17.99 ■ **STC**

OUTSIDERS VOL. 3: WANTED DC

The Outsiders could benefit from Elvis' advice in this collection (issues #16-#23) "A little less conversation, a little more action." And less smarmy, glib conversations, we might add. John Walsh guest stars because...well, we have no idea why, even when it's a lackluster child abduction mystery. Still, the trade keeps the cliffhangers coming; most notably two shocking reveals involving Batman and Deathstroke. **C-** OCT 19 $14.99 ■ **CW**

SAMURAI: HEAVEN AND EARTH

DARK HORSE

Writer Ron Marz's love for the sword-slicing genre shines brightly in this tale of a warrior's globe-spanning quest to rescue the love of his life that brings him blade to blades with the Three Musketeers, and the pace is further quickened by the lush Cassaday-esque art of Luke Ross. The occasional action-epic cliche shouldn't stop *Samurai* from chopping out a place on your reading list. **B-** OCT 26 $14.95 ■ **STC**

X-MEN: BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

SUPREME POWER VOL. 3: HIGH COMMAND

MARVEL/MAX

J. Michael Straczynski and Gary Frank produce a gruesome tale of murder and betrayal in their final arc (#13-#18) under the MAX banner. From a superpowered serial killer to racial tension between African-American heroes Nighthawk and the Blur to the government's intent to take down Hyperion through the media, the title is a pitch-perfect, mature superhero book with both violent imagery and touching moments. **A-** OCT 19 | $14.99 ■ **MC**

ULTIMATE FANTASTIC FOUR VOL. 4: INHUMAN

MARVEL

With its measly three issues (*Ultimate Fantastic Four* #19-#20 and *Ultimate Fantastic Four Annual* #1), this trade loses points for quantity and price. (13 bucks?!) Then again, Jae Lee's gorgeous artwork more than compensates in the quality department. And having a creepy Mike Carey tale about the Ultimate Mad Thinker and the first appearance of the Ultimate Inhumans by Mark Millar certainly doesn't hurt. **B-** | OCT 26 | $12.99 ■ **RH**

X-MEN: BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE MARVEL

The only thing more bizarre than the love triangle between Gambit, Rogue and a vampy mutant named Foxx in *X-Men* #171-#174 (collected here) is the revelation that Foxx is actually Mystique. Scratch that—what's more bizarre is that after attempting to seduce the ragin' Cajun into giving in to his ragin' libido, the treacherous minx actually seeks membership on the team! How bizarre, indeed. **C-** | OCT 12 | $9.99 ■ **RH**

RUNAWAYS

After battling their way back from cancellation, Marvel's teen team supreme bursts on the scene with action, humor, dinosaurs and D-listers

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN
ADRIAN ALPHONA
MARVEL COMICS

Technically speaking, you shou dn't be able to read new issues of *Runaways*

Thrown on the chopping block after its initial 18-issue run, Marvel was all but ready to bid farewell to its newest teen heroes when something completely unexpected happened

"We're sort of like a movie that did okay when it was in the box office but then exploded to life when it was on DVD," writer/co-creator Brian K Vaughan jokes. "As I was writing issue #18, which I thought was going to be our last issue, Marvel got the numbers for our trade paperbacks, which were outselling all of the other Marvel collections, including Spider Man and X-Men books."

It wasn't a fluke The book is that good

Mirroring the twists and turns that happen inside every issue, the team cheated a trip into cancellation oblivion to go on in their second volume which Vaughan jokingly refers to as season 2. With truckloads of the same nail-biting mystery, gut-busting humor and heaping doses of the main ingredient that catapulted Marvel to the forefront of comics in the 1960s—youth—Vaughan and artist Adrian Alphona pour their hearts and souls into this underdog title that wouldn't go down without a fight, making the second run even better.

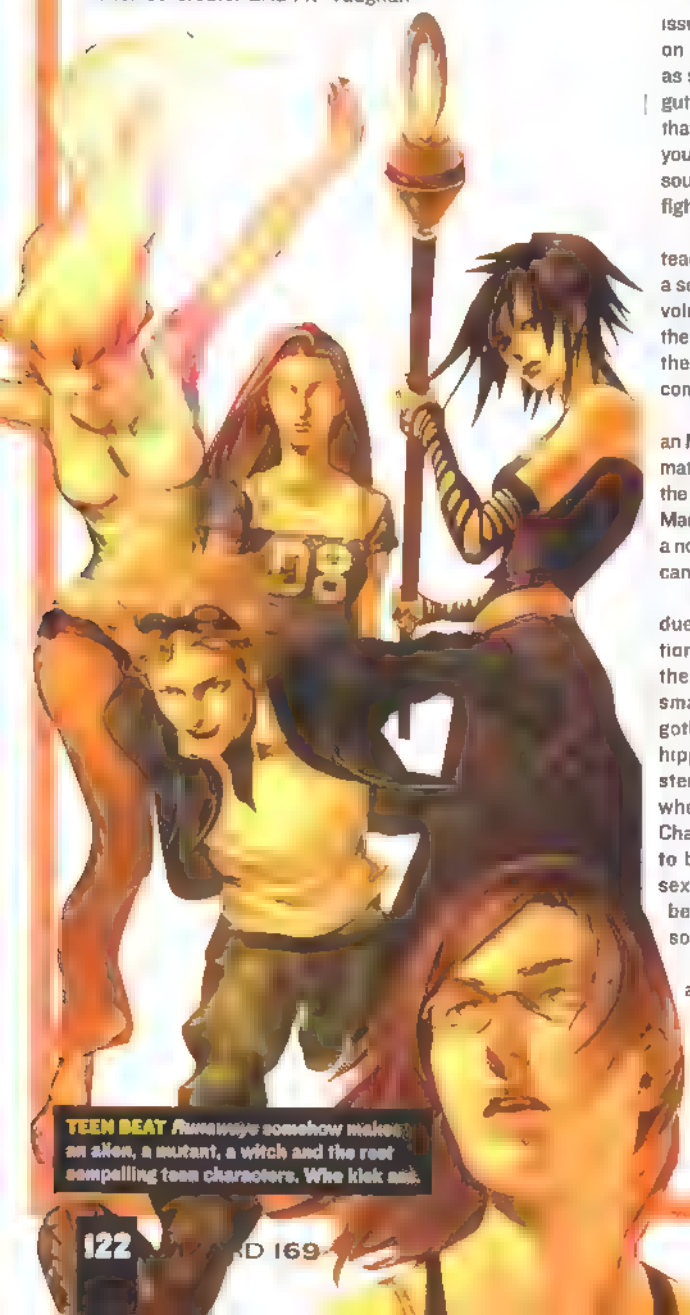
While the previous installment of *Runaways* followed the team on their first mission, taking on their evil parents who led a secret criminal organization known as the Pride, the second volume picks up with the kids on their own and a little wiser in their struggle to figure the world out What hasn't changed are the three key elements that keep readers both new and old coming back month after month.

Element #1 There are more mysteries and plots twists than an M. Night Shyamalan film festival, from figuring out which teammate was betraying the team in the first volume to discovering the secret supervillain father of the title's newest character, Victor Mancha in the first arc of volume two. Nearly every issue ends on a note that has you begging for the next one to arrive, just so you can see what happens in five more seconds.

Element #2 The characters look, sound and feel real, due entirely to Vaughan's crack dialogue and characterization and Alphona's fantastic character designs These are the kids we all went (or go) to school with, whether it's the smart-ass pudgy girl, not-so-bright jock, cute-but-weird goth chick, stuffy-headed computer nerd or save-the-Earth hippie Whereas every character starts off as one of these stereotypes, each issue adds a layer of depth to the point where they're not just characters on a page anymore. From Chase's transformation from dumb jock to loveable tech guy, to beautiful Karolina's struggle to come to grips with her sexuality, each character goes through some change, for better or worse. And as the characters matured and grew so did the creative team

"[Adrian and I] were both pretty new with our first issue, and I think we got exponentially better as the book went on," Vaughan admits. "It was sort of fun that we got to grow up with our characters In the beginning, they were sort of naive, innocent, don't-know-very-much kids, and so were we. I think by the time we got to issue #18, you could really see we'd grown up a lot."

Element #3 You'll have a really hard time finding a book that'll make you laugh more, or at least grin evilly



TEEN BEAT *Runaways* somehow makes an alien, a mutant, a witch and the rest compelling teen characters. Who kick ass.

DYNO-MIGHT Five kids and a dinosaur teammate tool around with Victor Mancha, whose "father" turned out to be Ultron.

Vaughan is as much a comic geek as anyone who reads the title, and it shows when he throws in digs at D-List characters, like when Victor knows the name and history of everyone on team Excelsior...except for Ricochet (see **sidebar**). And hey, where else will you find a team with a domesticated dinosaur as a vital member of the group, traveling around in a big ship shaped like a frog that hops instead of flying?

Back on its feet with sales going up every month, *Runaways* may be out of danger in real life, but the team's adventures have only just begun. In the latest arc kicking off with issue #9 in October, titled "East Coast, West Coast," the gang runs into Cloak and Dagger, who they first met in volume I. Cloak is on the run from both the law and Marvel's heroes when Dagger turns up beaten within an inch of her life and he's blamed. Having no one else to turn to, Cloak asks the L.A.-based Runaways to return to New York City with him to uncover who the real culprit is.

"I was originally going to call it 'Selling Out,' because it has a gratuitous New Avengers crossover," Vaughan laughs. "That's actually something I've been wanting to do for a while. It's just going to be a lot of fun having the kids meet Spider-Man, the Marvel Universe's first teenage superhero. So there will be crossovers galore, but hopefully still accessible to the 15-year-old girls that only read our books in collections."

After the run-in with Marvel's team supreme, Vaughan promises a major story arc featuring "the return of some old faces."

Could this be the return of the Pride? Perhaps Alex, the traitor-turned-pile-of-ashes among the group in the first series? Vaughan will say only this: "Usually if it's a thing that everyone is expecting to happen in *Runaways*, it's the last thing that's going to happen." Happy guessing.

■ **DYLAN BRUCIE**

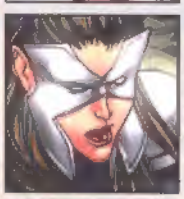
FALLINGSTARS

The regular cast of *Runaways* is fun enough for any six books, but writer Brian K. Vaughan throws in about a million obscure guest stars in each storyarc to boot—so we asked him to run down some of his favorites.

CLOAK AND DAGGER "I think they're the best idea that's not a book at Marvel right now. If you think *Runaways* is subversive, Cloak and Dagger got their powers from drugs. It's the worst message to send to children! They were Marvel's first teenage runaway superheroes, so it only makes sense to use them."

RICOCHET "I wanted to play all these characters as former child stars. There was a time when *Wizard* was hailing [Ricochet's team book] *Slingers* as the greatest comic book of all time, and now no one knows who Ricochet is. And you know, God forbid *Runaways* suffers the same fate someday."

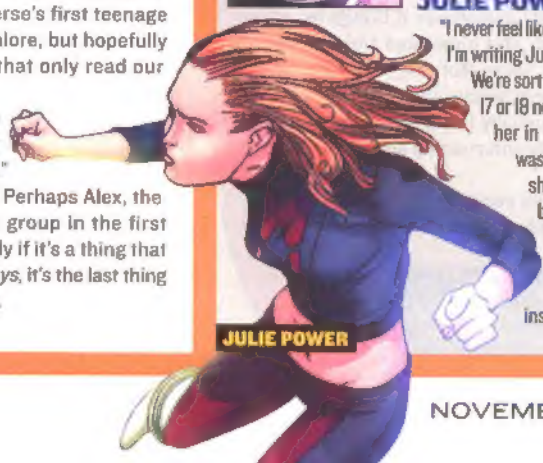
PHIL URICH (GREEN GOBLIN IV) "I went back and read all his old issues because I so live in fear of the continuity nerds. He's the good Green Goblin, which I can't even wrap my brain around! That's like having a superhero named Kid Hitler!"



TURBO "I wasn't a huge *New Warriors* fan, but I was familiar with them. Speedball is who I really wanted, but they were already using him for the *New Warriors* relaunch, so I had to dig even deeper. It was cool that Turbo had some journalism experience because it gave us an excuse to set her up with Phil."

SWARM "A former Nazi who found some sort of cosmic meteorite that bonded his body to bees. That's too spectacularly weird not to have the Runaways go up against! It's fun to see how they handle fighting him, too, especially when some of them are allergic to bee stings."

DARKHAWK "I think he's like one of those guys who was a great athlete in his prime, but as he's gotten older, his gift has faded and it's left him bitter and hurt. But that doesn't mean he can't redeem himself."



JULIE POWER

"I never feel like such a dirty old man as when I'm writing Julie Power [from *Power Pack*]. We're sort of playing her that she's about 17 or 18 now, and I just told Adrian to put her in the same costume that she was wearing when she was 12. But she's sort of outgrown it, so it's become a belly shirt and I feel so dirty because I'm like, 'Wow, I'm really attracted to Julie Power. This is sick! I'm insane!'" ■ **DB**

FLAMING CARROT

Iron City's greatest superhero may be stupid, irresistible to women and a little insane, but after 25 years, his identity remains cloaked in mystery

WRITER/ARTIST: BOB BURDEN
PUBLISHER: IMAGE/DESPERADO

THE DIRT Clad in a giant mask and green flippers (in case he needs to swim), our blue-collar hero deploys every tool in his utility belt—including a yo-yo, an oversized sock and twin blazing .45s—to fight crime, bust ghosts and score chicks as the Flaming Carrot!

DOYA LIKE? If you pine for new episodes of "The Tick," thrill at the two-fisted adventures of Will Eisner's *The Spirit* and Eric Powell's *The Goon* or crack up at the disjointed comedy of classic "Simpsons" and "Kids in the Hall," then Bob Burden's carrot-headed hero is right up your crime-ridden alley.

DIDJA KNOW? Flaming Carrot's primary means of transportation, a nuclear-powered pogo stick invented by his scientist friend Dr. Heller, was the subject of a question on "Jeopardy!" The contestant got it right.

Bandit moons. Giant hot wings. Flying dead dogs. Clones of Hitler's feet. Bimbos. To defend his Palookaville district of Iron City, Flaming Carrot takes on all comers—for kicks! But what kind of hero could face such absurd adversity?

Legend has it that a man, plagued by the demons of years wrought with sex, substance abuse and fast cars, read 5,000 comics in a single sitting to win a bet. Suffering brain damage, he was never the same again—ending his life of shameful overindulgence and launching the adventures of the strangest man alive.

Nearly 25 years after that humble (and deliberately vague) origin saw print, creator, writer and artist Bob Burden has relaunched "the world's first surrealist superhero" in an ongoing quarterly series from Image Comics and Desperado Publishing.

"When I say 'surreal,' sometimes it brings to mind a lot of gibberish and nonsense thrown together like a collage," says Burden. "*Flaming Carrot* has odd characters, wacky situations and deranged villains, but usually has a strong and coherent—and hopefully entertaining and well-crafted—storyline, too."

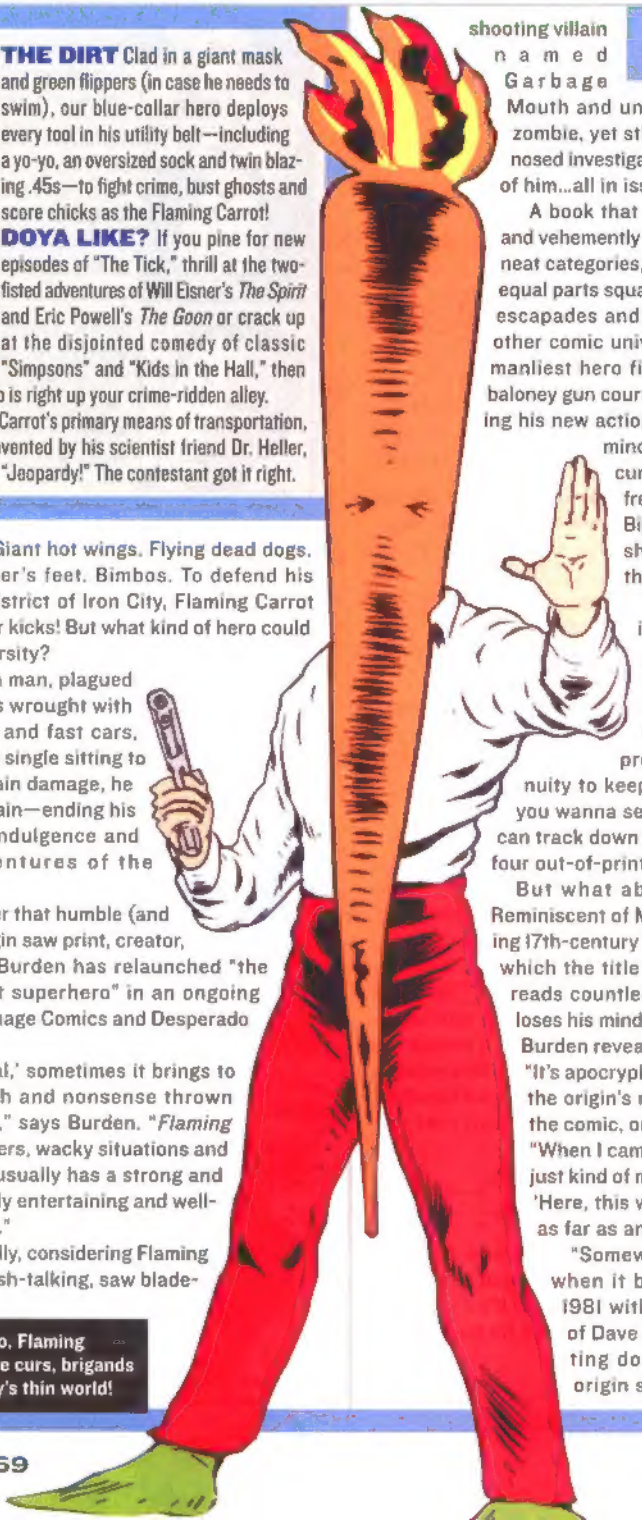
That's putting it mildly, considering Flaming Carrot might fight a trash-talking, saw blade-shooting villain named Garbage Mouth and unwittingly befriend a singing zombie, yet still find time to seduce a hard-nosed investigative journalist doing an exposé of him...all in issue #1.

A book that flagrantly defies explanation and vehemently refuses to be pigeonholed into neat categories, *Flaming Carrot Comics* mixes equal parts square-jawed fisticuffs, superhero escapades and off-the-wall humor. In what other comic universe would town's toughest, manliest hero fight off a supervillain with a baloney gun courtesy of a toy company promoting his new action figure line? The same hero, mind you, who in issue #3 of the current series takes a date to eat free hot dogs at the Toyota-Thon Big Tent Sale and plans a comic shop signing appearance with the Neil Gaiman of Earth-2.

Almost every single *FCC* issue stands alone, so it always provides a great jumping-on point—not that that'll make it any less hilariously confusing for the uninitiated. And Burden promises no convoluted continuity to keep out new readers (though if you wanna see the earlier adventures, you can track down the previous 32 issues or the four out-of-print Dark Horse trades).

But what about that dubious origin? Reminiscent of Miguel de Cervantes' pioneering 17th-century Spanish novel *Don Quixote*, in which the title character, a senile old fool, reads countless books of chivalry until he loses his mind and believes himself a knight, Burden reveals a secret long unaddressed. "It's apocryphal," he says, pointing out that the origin's never actually been shown in the comic, only told second or third-hand. "When I came up with the character, I was just kind of messing around, and I decided, 'Here, this works,' and boom, there it is," as far as an origin is concerned.

"Somewhere around the early days when it became a regular series [in 1981 with Aardvark-Vanaheim, home of Dave Sim's *Cerebus*], I started sitting down and thinking about the origin story," explains Burden, who



UT! A vicious, ruthless hero, Flaming Carrot soundly throttles the curs, brigands and balderdashers of today's thin world!

ZEN STUPID At home with his zombie and two adoring girlfriends, Flaming Carrot lets adventure take him where it will!

decided then to develop the existing character around a real-life figure. "I put little clues in there that people could guess at, and some people actually guessed them. I wanted to keep the mystery going, with all the various people they were guessing—Bruce Lee and Pee-wee Herman and ["Lost in Space" child star] Bill Mumy and all these other characters. So I said, 'I'm gonna keep it secret,' and I kept it secret."

But after 25 years, Burden plans to finally pop the mysterious bubble surrounding the never-unmasked Carrot in a future issue, promising a tremendous shock. He won't tease at the answer, however, and welcomes adventurous, absurd-minded readers to enter his unique world and ponder it for themselves—a world of cute baby werewolves and sexy, two-headed stage divas, where villains can be impaled on their own word balloons and where dead dogs leap up and fly around the room!

THE LAST WORD Without a doubt one of the world's strangest and most unique comics, each standalone issue of *Flaming Carrot* delivers a mind-warping, brow-furrowing, high-flying action-packed tale of adventure, laffs and cheap, gin-fueled romance. ■ **ALEJANDRO ARBONA**

WANNA PICK UP THIS SERIES?

Call 1 888 COMIC-BOOK to find your nearest comic shop, or visit www.flamingcarrot.com for more info. Do you know about a cool series that deserves the "Secret Stash" treatment? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY. 10920, or e-mail us at secretstash@wizarduniverse.com.

INDIEBUZZ

ZOMBIE TALES: DEATH VALLEY (BOOM! Studios) Writer Andrew Cosby can't get enough of the undead. First he chronicled the takeover of the United States by vampires in *Damn Nation* (now out in trade paperback—see p. 120). And now, having participated in BOOM!'s earlier *Zombie Tales* one-shot, Cosby joins artist Johanna Stokes to tell the tale of a group of spoiled rich kids from the Valley who emerge from a wild party only to find that zombies have overrun the world. (But hey, don't they always?) Think "Land of the Dead" set in "The O.C." and you've got the idea. California, here they come! **(#1 & #2: Oct.) $6.99, www.boom-studios.com**

CONVERSATION #2 (Top Shelf) James Kochalka's the indie rocker responsible for the superhero spoof *Super F*ckers* and the daily Web comic *Sketchbook Diaries*. Jeffrey Brown's the critics' darling behind autobio *AE!OU* and Wolverine homage *Dying Time*. And together they fight crime! Okay, not really—but they've collaborated on *Conversation #2*, the latest in Kochalka's series of jam comics ruminating on life, the universe and everything else. **(Oct.) $4.95, www.topshelfcomix.com**

POP CULTURE SHOCK THERAPY (Bratton Cartoon Studios) Doug Bratton is a man with a mission: To parody every bit of pop culture he can get his hands on, "Family Guy"-style. From "Looney Tunes" to "Star Wars" to superheroes, his daily Web comic has hit 'em all. But that wasn't enough. He's published this collection so that even people without computers can bask in its glory. Mission accomplished! **(Out now) $15, www.popculturecomics.com**

PYONGYANG (Drawn & Quarterly) Canadian cartoonist Guy Delisle spent two months in the capital of North Korea, working as an animator. Both funny and frightening, this thought-provoking, true-story hardcover of Delisle's time under the watchful eye of dictator Kim Jong-Il's regime reveals nightmarish conditions that comic book tyrants like Dr. Doom and Magneto could only dream about. **(Oct.) $24.95, www.drawnandquarterly.com**

DEVIL'S DUE ROCK COVERS Not since Cold Slither have the G.I. Joes rocked this hard! Throughout October, *G.I. Joe, Snake Eyes: Declassified, Forgotten Realms: Exile, Dragonlance Chronicles, Purgatori* and *Evil Ernie* will boast covers by famous rock poster artists Rich Black, Casey Burns, Jeff Gaither and David Witt. If Gaither's deranged Evil Ernie or Witt's badass Snake Eyes don't kick out your jams, go back to your Kenny G. records, pal. **$2.95-$4.95, www.devilsdue.net**
■ **SEAN T. COLLINS**

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